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DUNGEON

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Campaign Workshop: Crafty Villains

By Cal Moore ✦ illustrations by Mathias Kollros

Sometimes you need a last-minute villain for your upcoming game. Or maybe you have a sudden power vacuum created after your adventurers defeated their current foes. Whatever your situation might be as a Dungeon Master, you might find the two villains below a boon. They are leaders of their respective groups, yet they can be played as servants of a greater power. Tulka Deathrattle, an orc death shaman, would be a good opponent for characters in the lower heroic tier, while Scarlet Jax is a half-elf rake who would be a fitting enemy for characters in the upper heroic tier.

Tulka Deathrattle

"Faster, my vipers! Pull the stones away before the bright-eyed priests of the temple know we're about. And watch your hands! Otar's final resting place will be trapped to protect his knowledge!"

The orc warriors hurried their efforts at her words, though some looked toward the nearby temple eagerly, obviously wishing for just such a fight. Tulka watched them widen the hole they had created through the mortared stones of the outer crypt wall, knowing that their time was limited.

"Quickly now! The master will be pleased if we find the tome of lasting death, and he is generous when he is pleased. Torok and Korg, pull those stones away and let us see if Otar was as smart as he thought he was."

The sound of large, wooden doors creaking open halted the orcs' frenzied activity. A handful of temple soldiers and one of the Raven Queen's priests emerged and began hustling toward the gravediggers, drawing weapons as they approached.

"So be it then! Let us fight," Tulka commanded. "Vipers up front to handle those runts with the pigstickers. I'll take care of the priest."

Tulka watched the temple guards move forward in a tight group; they obviously thought they would easily mow down a troop of orcs. She smiled as she eyed the priest, who stayed too close to the front ranks of his more armored fellows. Well, they would get more than they bargained for. Lifting her totem, a wooden staff carved with the head of a viper, she circled it in front of her as she called out to her spirit companion.

Even as the bone rattle within the totem slowed its eerie spinning, a vaporous form rose from the ground and slithered as a mist among the temple guardians, coalescing into a semitranslucent, skeletal snake. Perhaps the priest will enjoy the spirit viper's caress, thought Tulka as she gave the command to her troops.

"Attack!"

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Tulka's History

Occasionally, one of the proud orc shamans of the barrens will come into conflict with the primal order, delving into the secrets of necromancy or falling under the sway of a necromantic power that warps the shaman's wisdom. This act is an affront to nature and sees the shaman banished from the tribe, if not killed. But because of the strength it brings to such a leader, these "death" shamans sometimes find followers who enjoy what the association can bring them, or in rare cases, assert control over a war chief and convince the tribe to follow new ways of power.

In Tulka's case, a human necromancer of great power named Lorvald captured her during a raid. Rather than experiment on her or kill her, he corrupted her and her connection to the primal world through a powerful necromantic ritual. The ritual replaced the flow of primal energy in her with the necrotic power of death and created a servant who would do his bidding without question.

With the transformation, Tulka walked hand in hand with death rather than life. Her spirit companion fled her and was replaced by an undead death viper—a skinless, decaying, semitranslucent skeletal snake whose bite brings death. To match her changed disposition, Tulka began painting her face to resemble a skull and took up a new implement: a staff carved as a viper and covered in dead snake skins, with a set of fangs protruding from its head and a snake's rattle embedded within it that sounds whenever she calls upon her power.

Death Shaman Lore

Nature or Religion DC 10: Death shamans are primal spellcasters who have been perverted by the powers of necromancy. They are an abomination to the primal order.

Nature or Religion DC 15: A death shaman can still command the power of nature, but that power is corrupted with necrotic energy. Though such activity is considered an affront by any normal shaman, a death shaman will employ the use of undead.

Nature or Religion DC 22: The strongest death shamans have the power to conjure terrible spirits from the Shadowfell as companions. The death shaman does still have a link to these perverted spirits and can be hurt when they are destroyed. Not all death shamans chose to become what they are.

Tulka Deathrattle Tactics

Tulka prefers to lead her followers from the back. She has collected a group of orc warriors that don't mind

Tulka Deathrattle Level 5 Elite Controller (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid, orc XP 400

HP 122; **Bloodied** 61 **Initiative** +3
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 19 **Perception** +6
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Resist 5 necrotic
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Standard Actions

Staff (necrotic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 necrotic damage.

Viper Strike (implement, necrotic, poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 2 poison damage. The target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 necrotic and poison damage (save ends both).

Deathrattle Burst (implement, necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close burst 1 centered on Tulka or her undead spirit viper (enemies in the burst); +8 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of Tulka's next turn. In addition, one ally in the burst gains 5 temporary hit points.

Minor Actions

Call Viper (conjuration, implement , necrotic, poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Tulka conjures an undead spirit viper in an unoccupied square within 10 squares of her. The viper lasts until it is destroyed, until Tulka drops to 0 hit points, or until she dismisses it as a minor action. The viper occupies its square. Enemies can't move through its space, but allies can. When Tulka takes a move action, she can also move the viper up to 6 squares. If the viper takes 10 damage or more from a single attack, it is destroyed and Tulka takes 10 damage; the viper is otherwise unaffected by attacks. Tulka can have only one undead spirit viper conjured at a time. In addition, the undead spirit viper can make the following attack.
Trigger: An enemy leaves a square adjacent to the viper.
Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 1 (the triggering enemy); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 4 necrotic and poison damage.

Spirit Strike (necrotic, poison) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: Tulka commands her undead spirit viper to make the following attack.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 4 necrotic and poison damage.

Skills Arcana +9, Nature +11

Str 16 (+5)	**Dex** 12 (+3)	**Wis** 19 (+6)
Con 13 (+3)	**Int** 15 (+4)	**Cha** 15 (+4)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Equipment robe, staff

the abomination of her death magic because of the power and wealth she has brought them; they call themselves the viper clan. While her "vipers" are out in front, Tulka uses *call viper* to summon her spirit companion, then uses move actions to get it to a position where it can make opportunity attacks against enemies, or she can use *spirit strike* against enemies adjacent to it. She waits for the best opportunity to use *deathrattle burst* to hurt as many enemies as possible while healing her allies.

Encounters

Tulka and her vipers make good opponents as servants to a greater power, whether that greater person is Lorvald or some other master. The characters could encounter her while she's searching a tomb, a barrow, or some other place of death looking for necromantic knowledge for her master. Or perhaps she and her vipers are trying to set up a base near a small town or village to bring new recruits or victims to her master. In addition to her vipers, she's likely to surround herself with unintelligent undead as a further line of defense. One interesting aspect to Tulka is that she was made into a death shaman against her will. Perhaps some remnant of her soul still resists the ritual that changed her, and she could be redeemed by a group of observant heroes.

Scarlet Jax

"Are you Master Porthios?" Scarlet Jax asked brightly.

"Why yes, my dear, I am. My, what a lovely sight you are. How can I help you?" The elderly man was so gaunt that his dark eyes seemed to hide within recessed sockets.

"You have quite the silver tongue, don't you, Master Porthios? Well, you can 'help' me by handing over what you have in that locked strongbox behind the counter. I know someone who will pay very well for it." Jax's bright smile widened even further with these words.

"What . . . who are you? I will do no such thing. Leave now before I call the guards!"

I've utterly flustered him, Jax thought. I love it when they underestimate me. Smiling her most winning smile, she assessed the stupid merchant of arcane antiquities. He probably had a surprise or two up his sleeve for protection, but so did she. Plus, she had brought friends to this 'exchange of goods.'

Whistling, Scarlet Jax quickly spun, whipping her scarlet cloak about her as she drew her rapier and pointed it at the old man all in one fluid motion.

"Now that would be a bad idea, Porthios!" Jax cautioned. "Boys, come say hello to the nice old man; he's got some wonderful toys in here."

The merchant's eyes widened as he saw a gang of ruffians enter his store, but he was more concerned with the rapier pointed at his neck. "You're Scarlet Jax!" he blurted out.

Jax nodded slightly, never taking her eyes off him. The merchant, now truly afraid, slowly reached down for the strongbox with a defeated sigh.

Scarlet Jax's History

Scarlet Jax, a charismatic, half-elf rake known for her red hair and scarlet cloak, has always been an opportunist. Even as a youth on the shores of a large port town full of scoundrels, she found ways to succeed. She learned that lying, cheating, and killing were the best ways to gain wealth and power, and she has been following those lessons ever since. As she gained experience as a mercenary, she learned that it is better to be the one leading the gang rather than just a soldier in the gang. To that end, she has put together a group of ruffians that she calls her "boys," and she has so far had a successful career robbing and stealing from anyone she can. She is willing to sell the gang's services to the highest bidder . . . and to take on a job that sounds like fun.

Scarlet Jax's Lore

Streetwise DC 12: Scarlet Jax is the leader of a ruthless gang of robbers who will steal, cheat, and kill to get what they want. She is as dangerous with her rapier as she is charming. She calls the members of her gang her "boys."

Streetwise DC 17: Scarlet Jax is a mercenary who can be hired out for special thefts or as muscle if it pleases her. Named for her red hair and cloak, Scarlet Jax is an elusive leader who has escaped the clutches of the law many times.

Streetwise DC 25: Many stories say that Scarlet Jax is a dirty fighter and an expert liar. She often works for powerful and dangerous masters, and she knows many of the secrets of the local area's crime lords.

Scarlet Jax	**Level 9 Elite Skirmisher (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, half-elf	XP 800
HP 192; **Bloodied** 96	**Initiative** +10
AC 23, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20	**Perception** +10
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	
Traits	
Combat Advantage	
Scarlet Jax deals 2d6 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to her.	
Standard Actions	
Rapier (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 7 damage.	
Dagger (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d4 + 7 damage.	
Dirty Fighting (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 7 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of Scarlet Jax's next turn.	
Double Attack ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: Scarlet Jax uses *dirty fighting* twice.	
Move Actions	
Hard to Follow (zone) ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: Scarlet Jax moves up to 6 squares. The squares through which Scarlet Jax moves become a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter. Squares in the zone are difficult terrain.	
Triggered Actions	
Outright Lie ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: Scarlet Jax makes a Bluff check.	
Effect (Free Action): Scarlet Jax gains a +5 bonus on the check.	
Scarlet Flourish ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅	
Trigger: An enemy hits Scarlet Jax.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Scarlet Jax shifts up to 4 squares. This shift ignores difficult terrain.	
Skills Acrobatics +13, Athletics +11, Bluff +13, Streetwise +13	
Str 14 (+6) **Dex** 18 (+8) **Wis** 12 (+5)	
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 15 (+6) **Cha** 19 (+8)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven	
Equipment leather armor, dagger, rapier	

Scarlet Jax Tactics

Scarlet Jax attacks with surprise when possible, choosing the time and place of an encounter. She uses *double attack* to make *dirty fighting* attacks, which can leave her enemies dazed for her allies to target. Throughout a fight, Jax continually moves around the battlefield. She uses *scarlet flourish* to move away from a dangerous enemy, crossing over or through difficult terrain to make it more difficult for enemies to follow. Scarlet Jax uses *hard to follow* to isolate enemies for her allies or to escape, overturning items and throwing objects in her path as she moves (or dropping caltrops from a pouch). *Outright lie* can be an effective way to gain temporary combat advantage, if Jax has no other way to gain it.

Encounters

Scarlet Jax and her boys are very good at what they do—causing mischief, robbing merchants, hatching plots, and defying the law. She looks for whatever opportunity will bring her the best reward, but as a mercenary for hire, she often serves other masters who pay well and appreciate her skills. The characters might be hired to hunt down her gang for their crimes, or might come across her as part of an adventure in a city. Initially, they might encounter Scarlet Jax alone when she's acting as an agent involved with one of their adventures. In this case, she uses her ability to lie to fool even the most perceptive characters. Only later will they realize that she has been manipulating events. Being an opportunist, she surrenders if that works in her favor, and she might give up her master if it will save her life (if doing so would be worse than death, though, she keeps her mouth shut).

About the Author

Cal Moore joined Wizards of the Coast in 2000 as an editor for the *Showdown* line of sports TCGs. He has contributed to a wide range of trading card games, miniatures games, Avalon Hill games, and Dungeons & Dragons® games, books, and articles..

Enemies & Allies

Boss Laughter

By Robert J. Schwalb ✦ Illustration by Michael Faille

"Ask anyone in Overlook and they'll tell you Blister is no place to get lost. Why, just last week we lost a squad to the Bully Boys who've been beating and terrorizing the priests on Nine Bells' verge. And don't get me started on the Roundabout Killer, who is racking up quite the body count. We pulled another luckless bastard out of an alley just this morning. The wretch had the misfortune of putting his neck in a knife's path. So when you ask me about Boss Laughter, I'm not sure what to tell you. He's an odd one. Folks down in the Blister keep their distance from that freak, and I've heard stories about how he snatches people for his experiments. Let me stop you. Yes. We've picked him up a few times. Hells, I checked his cart myself the last time. You know what I found? Bottles, powders, junk. Nothing I could arrest him for. But if ugly and spooky were crimes, I promise you we'd have locked him up a decade ago."

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There's no shortage of strange or scary in the district known as the Blister. This downtrodden slum is favored by mercenaries, adventurers, and the wretches who prey upon them. Walk its streets and you'll find the usual mix of thieves and beggars, urchins and enforcers, all mixing together to form an unwholesome stew unsuited for anyone but the brave and foolhardy. Sprinkled in among these people are a few bright characters who rise to the top due sometimes to their shocking generosity, and other times to their appalling wickedness. Boss Laughter has an abundance of both qualities.

A freak and a vagabond, Boss Laughter crawled out of a dark hole a few years ago. No one knows where he came from, but not long after he showed up, all sorts of stories swirled around the strange man: stories of people-snatching, horrid experiments, and murder. His apologists, and there are a few, claim he has acquired the bad reputation because he's different, which is to say he's ghastly, and his manner of dress only emphasizes his unwholesome character. Given the district's nature, had Boss Laughter been anyone else, he'd have been run out of town. The strange man earned his place there through the goods he peddles from his little cart. A man with a strange infection stands a good chance of recovering from it after a visit to Boss Laughter. An assassin needing a discreet poison can do worse than to stop by the rickety cart with the chiming bells. People have a way of overlooking the odd when it serves their purpose, and Blisterfolk are no different.

The interests captivating Boss Laughter are many and varied, but it is alchemy for which he is best known. Give him about half an hour, and he can whip up whatever a person needs, from explosives to curatives, and everything in between. And because he keeps his ingredients in unlabeled containers, no beat-walking constable can make heads or tails of their contents, so Boss Laughter stays free to go about his business.

What gives locals pause about this man is his queer appearance. Boss Laughter *might* be human. No one can tell because he hides his face under thick face paint. He cakes on white paste across his face so that the skin seems to crack and flake. Black paint surrounds his eyes and mouth, so his yellowed eyes and red wound of a maw contrast awfully with the bright white concealing his features. At a glance, he looks like a fat skeleton.

His attire elevates what would be a bizarre affectation to a grotesque one. Boss Laughter wears rags picked from the streets—a riot of colors all held in place with rusty pins. The few who have drawn close enough to do more than glance at the tattered remnants have sworn they are all spotted with blood. One crazed man claimed the rags were pinned through Boss Laughter's skin, while another swore they weren't rags at all, but feathers.

Boss Laughter makes rounds through Blister, pushing a small, wooden cart covered by a metal lid. Bells and chimes sprout all over it, and their ringing sounds like shrill laughter as he rolls through the alleyways. When a client engages his service, he listens, a stupid grin plastering his face, and then whips off the lid to begin mixing and stirring, boiling and brewing until the work is done. The Boss is proud of his skill, as his prices reflect. Sometimes, according to a few disreputable types, old Laughter will accept other forms of payment, such as trinkets, baubles, favors, or sacrifices.

So what does Boss Laughter want? This question has troubled people since he first waddled out from the darkness. Most think him deranged, perhaps from the lead paint he uses on his skin. They're right, of course. Except in one way, he doesn't seem to care about people; his only concern is that they enjoy his work and appreciate it as much as he does. That he has helped as many people as he has indirectly harmed does nothing to assuage the authorities' concerns about his presence in Overlook's seediest district.

Boss Laughter's Toys

"Do you like our tricks? Do you like our toys? How about the little games we play? Do they delight you? Do they make you laugh? Your pleasure is our greatest hope and desire, and there is nothing, and we mean nothing, we wouldn't do to make sure a smile brightens your face!"

Boss Laughter is a gifted alchemist and knows formulas for hundreds if not thousands of alchemical items. Somehow his little cart contains the ingredients to make them all. One enterprising thief boasted about how he was going to snatch the cart and pawn the contents. No one saw him again, though a familiar headband was seen knotted around the Boss's arm.

In addition to the alchemical items described in *Adventurer's Vault, Eberron Player's Guide,* and the pages of *Dragon* 376, Boss Laughter has devised a few items unique to him. Information about creating an item is provided before the item's statistics. "Formula Cost" is the price to buy the formula or have someone teach it to a character (formerly labeled "Market Price").

Clarity Salts

"Can't rouse your friend? Just pass this under his or her nose and it's wakey-wakey!"
Level: 4
Category: Curative
Time: 30 minutes
Component Cost: See the item's price
Formula Cost: 120 gp
Key Skill: Heal or Nature (no check)

The smell from these salts is so strong that they must be carried in a small glass vial and sealed with wax. When the seal is broken, the salts break down and release the vapors to bring swift and sudden clarity.

Clarity Salts — Level 4+ Uncommon

The odor from these tiny crystals is almost strong enough to wake the dead.

Lvl 4	40 gp	Lvl 19	4,200 gp
Lvl 9	160 gp	Lvl 24	21,000 gp
Lvl 14	800 gp	Lvl 29	105,000 gp

Alchemical Item

Power (Consumable): Minor Action. One ally adjacent to you can make a saving throw against a dazing or stunning effect, even if it does not normally allow a saving throw. If successful, the effect ends. The source of the effect must be less than or equal to 2 + the level of the salts.

Giggle Gas

"I recommend this to my bard friends. When they bomb, a little giggle gas can get the laughter started."
Level: 9
Category: Volatile
Time: 30 minutes
Component Cost: See the item's price
Formula Cost: 1,280 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

The potent gas interferes with the thought processes of a creature so it acts in an inappropriate fashion. For intelligent creatures, this means laughter. When you cool the gas, it becomes liquid so you can transfer it into a glass bead for easy delivery.

Giggle Gas — Level 9+ Uncommon

A great green cloud erupts from the shattered glass sphere and sets everyone in the area into convulsive laughter.

Lvl 9	160 gp	Lvl 24	21,000 gp
Lvl 14	800 gp	Lvl 29	105,000 gp
Lvl 19	4,200 gp		

Alchemical Item

Power (Consumable ✦ Zone): Standard Action. Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst). *Attack:* Item's level + 3 vs. Fortitude. *Hit:* The target is dazed and slowed until the start of its next turn.

Kinetic Oil

"Ah, this little treasure gives your weapon a little extra punch—if you know what I mean. It looks like oil, but I wouldn't cook with it!"
Level: 8
Category: Oil
Time: 10 minutes
Component Cost: See the item's price
Formula Cost: 500 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

When a weapon coated with this oil strikes a target, the oil absorbs the energy of the strike and some of it splashes onto the target. When the weapon hits the same target again, the oil rejoins and the energy is re-released with astonishing force.

Kinetic Oil — Level 8+ Uncommon

The thick oil sticks to your weapon, marring its surface with rainbow swirls.

Lvl 8	125 gp	Lvl 28	85,000 gp
Lvl 18	3,400 gp		

Alchemical Item

Power (Consumable): Minor Action. *Effect:* You apply the oil to one weapon. Until the end of the encounter, the first time you hit with the weapon, the weapon becomes charged until the end of your next turn. While the weapon is charged, you can make the following attack as a free action against each target you hit with the weapon.
Attack: Item's level + 3 vs. Fortitude.
Hit: You push the target 1 square and shift 1 square into the square the target vacated.

Walking Death

"I find this little mixture useful for keeping the rats from chewing on my toes. My customers tell me it works on rats of all sizes."
Level: 5
Category: Poison
Time: 10 minutes
Component Cost: See the item's price
Formula Cost: 400 gp
Key Skill: Nature or Thievery (no check)

Walking death is a vicious poison transmitted by food or drink. After consumption, the poison lies dormant for hours. When it finally activates, the results are swift and nearly always lethal.

Walking Death Level 5+ Uncommon

One moment, your victim is all smiles. The next, it keels over and dies.

Lvl 5	50 gp	Lvl 20	5,000 gp
Lvl 10	200 gp	Lvl 25	25,000 gp
Lvl 15	1,000 gp	Lvl 30	125,000 gp

Alchemical Item

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Minor Action. *Effect:* You sprinkle the poison into a drink or onto a plate of food. Until the end of the encounter, the first creature to consume that food or drink is subject to the following attack.
Attack: Item's level + 3 vs. Fortitude.
Hit: There is no effect for 1d6 hours. At the end of this time, the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is dazed (save ends both).
Level 15 or 20: Ongoing 10 poison damage.
Level 25 or 30: Ongoing 20 poison damage.

Using Boss Laughter

Although a sinister figure, Boss Laughter can be a useful ally to adventurers. The strange man can keep them supplied with alchemical items, potions, oils, poisons, and reagents, along with other consumables at your discretion. Also, since Boss Laughter roams the streets, he is a useful contact when the characters need information about the city's underworld, its major figures, and rumors on the streets.

Boss Laughter charges the normal purchase price for his creations. He will accept favors and items in trade. The favors he demands are unsavory and involve murder, theft, and kidnapping. As for items, he's interested in consumable items he can sell to other clients. He might accept larger investments and can even disenchant items to create *residuum*, though he is reluctant to do so since he cherishes magic objects regardless of their form.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred roleplaying game titles for Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the *d20 system*. Some of his most recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Monster Manual 3*, *Player's Handbook 3*, *Martial Power 2*, and also in the pages of both *Dragon* and *Dungeon Magazines*. Robert lives in Tennessee.

Backdrop: Mistwatch

By Robert J. Schwalb

Illustrations by Eric Belisle and Scott Murphy ✦ Cartography by Mike Schley

Looking back, we should have spotted the clues and seen the signs, because they were everywhere. Maybe if we had, we could have averted the disaster that befell our town and spared ourselves the hardships we now face. Yes, lamenting for opportunities lost serves no purpose aside from frittering away one's time.

I don't write these words to air my grievances or to pine for better days but to give warning to whoever finds this journal and to record what happened to Mistwatch in the hope others can avoid our fate. Waste no tears for us, friend. We earned our dooms through inaction and inattention. Our preference for a warm fire and cold ale brought us to this end, because when the evil was before us, staring us all in the face, we did nothing.

I beg you: Learn from our errors and be vigilant against the darkness. It is an insidious enemy armed with tricks and traps, wearing many masks. To falter even once invites disaster like none you have seen before.

Huddled against a hillside on a stony shore, Mistwatch has an exquisite view of Lake Wintermist's cold water. A sleepy town, blessed with riches pulled from the unyielding stone in the nearby Cairngorm Peaks, grown rich from timber cut from the Winterbole Forest, and fed well on trout and salmon drawn from the clear, mist-covered water, Mistwatch has long known peace and prosperity.

Its people are a simple folk. They make few demands on their lords and are content with their lives, finding peace and accord with their neighbors in spite of the differences that arise on occasion. But the good fortune Mistwatch enjoyed has come to an end. Now doom gathers in the shadows, and it will take bold action and bolder heroes to spare the town from a terrible fate.

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ONE TIME AT GEN CON

Bruce Cordell, Greg Bilsland, and I led a panel at Gen Con 2009 during which we talked about adventure design in broad strokes, describing the pitfalls and challenges but also offering insights into how to create memorable and exciting encounters and adventures. After that, we worked with the audience to come up with a scenario, stitching together villains, locations, and plot details into a workable adventure they could use in their own games or for us to plunder for an article or an adventure here in *Dungeon* magazine's pages.

What you read now owes much to that awesome crowd at Gen Con. The ideas and concepts lurking in the following pages were germinated from seeds planted by those fans. Taking all the ideas and fitting them into an adventure required more space than was available, so rather than pare down the ideas to a handful of encounters, we opted to give you a backdrop with hooks, concepts, and characters you can use to build your own adventure set in lost Mistwatch. Even if you don't use the whole backdrop, you have a slew of usable material to mine, including NPCs, plot hooks, and even an adventure framework on which to hang your encounters.

Oh, and for those folk who came to our seminar: Thanks! This one's for you.

Fall from Grace

If you know who we are and from where we came, then understanding our blindness is easy. We are not accustomed to evil's machinations. Aside from the brief Goblin War in my grandfather's youth, we have known no conflict and little violence. Certainly, two fishermen might come to blows when deep in their cups, but a broken nose and a few bruises are about all the tragedy we ever had to endure. Whispers tell of certain people who engaged in illicit pursuits, but who they were and what they did was no one's business but their own. This is why none of us noticed the strangeness in Widower's Watch, that cursed castle on the hill, and why none of us dreamt our undoing would come from an otherwise unremarkable lord.

Mistwatch's history is entwined with that of its lords. Back through the family line one finds that the town's founding rests with the first Zaspar known in this land. Boris Zaspar was a great knight in service to the Nerathan crown, and for his deeds, foremost of which was slaying the red dragon Pyrothenes, he was granted lands extending out from Lake Wintermist's western shore for as far as he could walk in every direction from sunrise to sunset. The hilly terrain in this area kept his holdings small overall, but large enough for a town and a few farms. So he brought his retainers and peasants to his new home and founded a settlement on the lake's shores.

The first building raised was Widower's Watch, named at its completion for Lord Zaspar, who lost his beloved wife to sickness the first year after claiming his land. After his castle was completed, stone buildings replaced the wooden shacks and piers grew out across the water to meet the burgeoning fishing industry's needs. Bricks paved muddy roads, and a temple to honor the gods arose in the upper land as shepherds and farmers cordoned off fields and pastures in the rolling hills all around Mistwatch. The crude hamlet became a thriving town, a trade partner for nearby Winterhaven, and an important stop for merchants bound west from Fallcrest, Hammerfast, and Harkenwold.

The lands were blessedly peaceful compared to Nerath's other frontiers. Mistwatchers rarely had to take up arms, because the land itself guarded them, making the town and its folk unattractive targets for the trouble beyond its borders. Some perils plagued them, however. Orcs would sometimes descend from their mountain homes to raid and plunder the outlying farmsteads. Packs of gnolls, remnants of the great horde that broke Nerath long ago, drifted through nearly a century ago. They claimed the Winterbole's deepest reaches, dislodged the goblins there, and sparked the Goblin War, the most important conflict Mistwatch had ever faced. But these challenges were short-lived, and the Mistwatchers always returned to their quiet ways.

Having never faced anything more dangerous than a few orcs or goblins, the town's residents were unprepared for true evil when it finally appeared. Had it worn a less attractive mask, they might have noticed before it was too late, but the long years had been kind to them. So accustomed were they to ease and comfort that small, though glaring, details passed unnoticed.

Cadmus Zaspar was the only son to his father Friedrich. Cadmus was a mild-mannered lord whose interests were books and legends, not the welfare of his people. The son inherited his father's zeal for intellectual pursuits and neglected his health, spending long days poring over dusty manuscripts and scrolls

brought in at high prices from distant libraries. His detachment from the world around him did not trouble his subjects; they preferred the family's' light rule. His fumbling, clumsy ways made the young man a somewhat amusing figure, and the townsfolk often greeted him with gentle teasing.

A few years into his rule, Cadmus had yet to produce an heir. This treatment troubled not only his advisors but also the wealthier tradefolk who wielded a great deal of influence in Widower's Watch. Cadmus's wife, Soela, was the fiery daughter of Aleister Criswell, an important merchant who had donated much gold to the Zaspar family. Most believed she was able (and willing) to bear Zaspar's children, but the lord was seemingly unable to sire a child. So the advisors sought counsel from healers, mages, mystics, and wise-folk, bringing both the learned and the phony from all over the Nentir Vale at great cost to their lord's coffers. After months spent with oils, herbs, and all manner of other strangeness, Soela was still without child. Mistwatch despaired that the Zaspar line would come to an end with Cadmus.

New hope did come to Mistwatch; it shuffled down the street leading a menagerie of strangers unlike any the locals had ever seen. They were pale and aloof, favoring black garb and odd body piercings. Spare with words, the strangers kept to themselves in an encampment just across the Run. Some muttered and whispered that the newcomers brought trouble, but such concerns were muted when Cadmus Zaspar opened his doors to the group's matriarch. She claimed she could cure Zaspar of his ills and help him fulfill his responsibility to produce an heir.

The matriarch was not old, but she moved with a slowness that hinted at great age. She spoke in an even voice, and her features belonged on a girl. Her eyes, however, suggested that she had seen much in her travels. No one witnessed the meeting, but loud voices and strange sounds filtered through the doors. She left soon after, head bowed, saying nothing to those in the castle. Although no one is certain what happened, the reflective black disk newly adorning Cadmus's wall led many to wonder if it was the long-awaited cure. The disk was a mirror made of polished obsidian, about 2 feet across and cold to the touch.

If the matriarch had an interest in the mirror's effects, neither she nor her attendants cared to witness them, because they quit the town that night and did not return—though, as the Mistwatchers soon learned, they didn't go far. Many wondered what price their lord had paid for their service. The results were clearly magical. Cadmus emerged the next morning a new man. His spare frame was muscled. The once-weak chin jutted proudly, and the

THE TRUTH

The strangers are a clan of shadar-kai who recently emerged from the Shadowfell under the leadership of Mistress Ranala, a priest devoted to the Raven Queen. Having escaped through a rift beneath the Keep on the Shadowfell opened by a meddling Orcus deathpriest, she and her followers drifted north to settle in the Winterbole Forest. Along the way, Ranala discovered through her auguries that followers of the Chained God hid among Mistwatch's people. They entered the town to root out the infestation and reveal their presence to Lord Cadmus. To their surprise, they learned Cadmus was a worshiper, having been seduced by the wicked god through the forbidden tomes he loved. The confrontation went poorly, and Ranala's effort to destroy him failed. She left defeated, her magic stolen, and with Cadmus more powerful than ever before.

Ranala and her followers withdrew to the outskirts of the town to find a way to recover the artifact Zaspar had stolen. Instead, they learned that the cultist had already unlocked its magic and used it to siphon energy from the townsfolk to perform some unspeakable ritual involving his wife and his 'child'. The magic from the now-corrupted relic not only stole life from the people but infected them with a vile disease—when they died, they rose soon after as undead. Worse, anyone who entered the town risked being exposed to the blight.

The shadar-kai refuse to enter the town and prevent anyone from leaving. A carrier could pass along the infection to anyone he or she meets. The shadar-kai encouraged the locals to stay put until a way could be found to defeat Zaspar. They allow others to enter because if they turned visitors away, word would surely spread, inviting unwanted attention and risking even greater exposure to the disease. Thus, the strangers seem like villains, but they are, if anything, pragmatic protectors sheltering the wider region from the evil growing in Mistwatch.

shadows that darkened his eyes had cleared. He was a vision of strength. When he addressed his people that day from a balcony overlooking the community square, his voice reached them all, powerfully and confidently.

Cadmus's newfound might and news of Soela's pregnancy drove all worries about the strangers from the Mistwatchers' minds. Normalcy returned. Folk went about their business as they always had. But the new peace the people felt was only the calm before the storm, for Cadmus was no longer the weak, ineffectual fool many had believed. The obsidian disk was an item of great power, and he used it not only to enhance his own strength but also to serve his sinister master, a deity known as the Chained God. He used the disk's magic to darken the town, infecting all with its poisonous curse. Over the next nine months, the sun paled in the sky and temperatures dropped. Fog rolled in from the lake and never left. Then people started dying.

No one thought twice about an aged man or woman passing in their sleep or a child tragically succumbing to a winter's sickness, but the dead piled up. Disease chewed away at the oldest and youngest citizens until the temple filled near to bursting with new corpses to bury. The people looked to their lord and the impending birth of his child for hope, but tragedy struck and forever altered Mistwatch's destiny.

Soela's labor was long and punishing, and the town priest knew she would not survive the ordeal. It seemed to him that the child drained away her life, devouring her strength as it struggled to be born. When the midwife drew the child free from its emaciated mother, it was clear this was no human babe. It shattered the midwife's mind so that she sealed herself up in her house. She lives, but as a gibbering, shrieking wreck whose cries can still be heard through the barred shutters.

After that night, the town's situation grew even worse. Low, dark clouds shut out the sun and its purifying rays. The plague started affecting even healthy people. Worse, the recently dead proved unwilling to stay in their graves. Each night they emerged to wander the streets, calling for loved ones, breaking into homes, and driving many people mad with terror.

Leaving Mistwatch proved impossible. The strangers that had brought trouble to the town's door did not vanish but only withdrew to watch (as many believed) their evil unfold. Those fleeing citizens who were not struck down by the strangers' swords and spells were driven back to the accursed town to await their turn to die and rise again. Fear became every survivor's companion. They all knew what waited for them. Now these people will do anything, even sell their souls, to escape their doom.

The Blight

From where did this disease come? How does it spread? I don't know. Hells, no one knows. Most blame the strangers. They seem the obvious choice. Mad Bartleby claims it's punishment from his sickening Chained God for our worship of false deities. Father Tomas also believes it comes from this mysterious god, but to spread suffering and evil. Our noble lord is silent, of course, offering nothing to ease our pains, leading me to wonder if Lord Zaspar might be the true enemy in our midst.

The plague striking Mistwatch is supernatural in origin. It was caused by Zaspar's abuse of the obsidian disk. The disk is solidified shadow drawn from the Shadowfell to help Mistress Ranala perform her auguries. Cadmus recognized its nature and believed he could release the shadow magic trapped within it to serve as fuel for his own dark rituals. As a side effect, the released shadow magic created a tear in reality, linking Mistwatch to an area in the Shadowfell.

Two consequences resulted from this event. One, Mistwatch now sinks into the Plane of Shadow, where it might be destroyed in the darklands or be transformed into a new domain of dread with Cadmus as its lord. Second, the shadow magic has mutated the normal sickness that spreads through town each winter, turning it into a virulent disease that kills its victims and then changes them into undead creatures.

Mistwatch Blight **Level 11 Disease**

Black ichor splotches your skin, spiderwebbing across your body until you feel something inside you begin to die.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.
Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes a –2 penalty to Insight checks and Perception checks. The target also loses a healing surge that cannot be regained until cured of the disease.
Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, same effect as stage 1, and the target is weakened until cured.
Stage 3: When affected by stage 3, the target dies. The next day, at sunset, the target rises as an undead creature. Most victims rise as zombies, but more powerful ones can rise as ghouls, wights, or wraiths.
Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.
12 or Lower: The stage of the disease increases by 1.
13–18: No change.
19 or Higher: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

Foggy Streets and Suspicious Stares

These streets are full of eyes. The friendly greetings from a year ago are silent. The warm handshake is cold. The camaraderie I once enjoyed is as dead as the corpses walking the streets at night.

In the decaying buildings and potholed streets, one can still find hints of the charm and beauty Mistwatch once possessed. Quaint houses line the broad lanes winding down the hillside to the shore. Some are still painted in gay colors and fronted with little gardens where locals coax what food they can from the rocky earth. One finds shops, taverns, restaurants, and grocers clustering around intersections , though many are now closed, with windows shuttered and doors blocked by boards nailed in place. Here and there, statues commemorate the town's founder (or some other Zaspar lord or lady), each depicting a man or a woman of action standing tall and proud, brandishing a sword or sometimes a scroll.

MISTWATCH

A dying community huddled on Lake Wintermist's shores, Mistwatch continues its inexorable slide toward annihilation.

Population: 565 living beings with another 1,500 or so undead. Humans are dominant among the living with smatterings of halflings, half-elves, dwarves, and elves from the Winterbole Forest. About 50 shadar-kai camp near the only road into town.

Government: Lord Cadmus Zaspar rules Mistwatch, though he has withdrawn to his castle, Widower's Watch, and hasn't emerged for nearly a year since his "child" was born.

Defenses: Vigilante groups led by adventurers and former constables protect the surviving townsfolk. Wealthy citizens maintain personal guards to protect their property from looters.

Inns: The only rooming house still in business is the Beacon Inn, a fine establishment once known for its extensive wine cellar.

Taverns: A few taverns still keep their doors open, and they serve as meeting places, havens, and guarded camps. The Baited Hook and the Sink are run-down dives near the shore. Smoke on the Water is an adequate tavern and restaurant near the center of the village.

Supplies: Few goods come into Mistwatch these days, and as a result many shopkeepers have shut their doors. Mort's Supplies is the only shop that has enough merchandise left to remain open.

Temples: The Temple of Three honors the gods Erathis, Melora, and Pelor. Shrines to other gods exist in the town, but few see petitioners. A new cult has formed in recent months, dedicating itself to the Chained God. Their leader, Bartleby Haff, is insane and preaches to any who listen from his pulpit on the town square.

The farther down the slope one travels, the stronger the sense of decay. Sagging wooden buildings and abandoned corpses line the streets; both crawl with bold rats that feast on leavings and putrid meat. The narrow roads twist between the buildings and wind beneath old signs that creak and sway even though no breeze stirs the fetid air. The poverty and squalor are further revealed in pinched faces and hunched frames. These unfortunate people have been driven to extremes to survive, and many differ from undead only in that their hearts still beat.

On the other side of this gauntlet, one comes to a filthy stretch of shore. This area features gravel roads puddled with standing water, shops fronting the lake's murky waters, and wharfs daring to extend into the lake. Many months have passed since a boat pulled up here. The few that have tried now lie beneath the water, with holes clawed through their hulls. In fact, only one vessel remains afloat: a decrepit-looking boat held by embattled survivors who are fighting a losing battle against the undead. Here, where the fog is thickest, the dead walk day and night, prowling and searching for hot blood and warm flesh.

Key Locations

So much loss, so much decay—even if we broke free from this stranglehold, I can't say there is much left worth saving.

The following locations provide a sample of the kinds of places the heroes might visit during their time in Mistwatch.

1. The Pinrae House

Rising at the block's far end is a fine house with shuttered windows and a stout iron door. A shield hangs above the entrance, displaying a sable swan on an azure field.

The Pinrae family has owned this house for three generations, ever since it was built by their own servants' hands. They made their fortune by investing in the fisheries, and then they paid to replace the rotting wooden docks with permanent stone wharfs. They also funded the fisherfolk, helping them acquire new ships, new nets, and additional crew. After they finished investing, the Pinraes sat back and claimed their share of the profits and the interest owed on the loans they made.

Like everyone else in Mistwatch, the Pinraes have suffered, but thanks to their large fortunes and their personal guard, they have kept the undead at bay. Their small mansion is now a fortress, with shutters on all the ground-floor windows and trusty iron in place of wooden doors. Furthermore, they have food and water to last them for another year, so the occupants have little need to go outside and forage.

Master Paul Pinrae is the head of the family and its business. He's a human in his mid-fifties, with shaggy gray hair, bland features, and a boil on his bottom lip. He dresses in frayed, though still fine, clothing, favoring vests, white shirts, and breeches. As the eldest of three sons, he inherited everything from his father and, until the last year, paid his brothers a meager stipend to keep them away. He has no idea what happened to his brothers—they never sought him out even after the payments stopped.

Paul Pinrae shares his home with his wife Melinda, a frail woman who recently fell ill with the sickness gripping the village. She is tended by their eldest child, a striking young woman named Pauline, who never married. Pauline loathes her father for his greed, though she will not turn away his coin when it comes time to inherit.

Pauline has two siblings: a brother named Phillip, who is a drunkard and a lecher with leering eyes, and Samantha, a half-elf child from an affair between Melinda and a traveling minstrel.

The rest of the household includes several servants and a garrison of ten guards led by Saul Promise, a gnarled old man who's quick with an insult for those who offend him and even quicker with a sword.

2. Beacon Inn

This two-story inn seems out of place for the village, being quite large. It is made from wood and stone, and it has glass windows, all in excellent repair.

The Beacon Inn is known throughout the region for its fine dining, excellent wine cellar, and dutiful staff. Only locals come here now, of course.

The main floor consists of a dining room with a dozen tables crowding the center and a few booths lining the wall. A bar runs the length of the room; large casks of ale from a local brewer line the wall behind the bar. The main floor also houses the kitchens, the staff's personal quarters, and the entrance to the cellar, where the proprietor keeps wine, food, and other supplies behind a locked door.

The second floor has twelve rooms; six small ones for one or two guests, and six larger, bunkhouse-style rooms. The smaller rooms face the street, and only those have windows. All are comfortable but sparse on décor.

The owner, Uriah Jimp, is a short, older human with a bald pate, heavy jowls, drooping eyes, and flushed features. He concluded early in the plague that something was wrong with the water and has forbidden his staff from drinking anything but his own water reserves, ale, or wine. His staff of four cooks, two grooms, and four maids is terrified by recent developments, and none dare leave the inn.

Jimp is pleasant, although since he gave up the well water, he has stayed just a hair shy of drunk. In his slurred speech, he can tell the heroes that the troubles started "when Cadmus Zaspar found 'is cure." Uriah knows what Cadmus was after and that a stranger eventually brought him a cure, though Uriah knows nothing about the obsidian mirror or its connection to the undead plague.

3. Mort's Supplies

This narrow building is tucked between an abandoned barber-surgeon's shop and an empty apothecary. Light emanates from within it.

A sign depicting the grim reaper pushing a fruit cart hangs above the door of the only general store still open. A burly human named Mort runs it, and he is famed for his temper and fairness, but he doesn't dicker over prices. Those who try to bargain hear, "What does the tag say?" Those who persist are shown to the door. Mort has the adventuring gear described in the *Player's Handbook*® and a few consumable magic items (your pick), none worth more than 50 gp each.

Mort is a devout man who claims that his prayers have saved him from the doom hovering over the town. Mort and a few other townsfolk stalk the streets at night to destroy undead and cleanse the town. If befriended, Mort might point the way to the Temple of Three, claiming that "Only through faith will we find redemption." He might also invite the heroes to join him on his nocturnal patrols.

4. The Pulpit of Chains

A macabre scene dominates the town square. Huddled in the center of plaza, surrounded by a barricade of rubble, old wagons, barrels, broken furniter, and other detritus, stand great crosses. Each cross holds a writhing corpse wrapped in chains and with black bile spilling from its yawning maw. In the middle of all this stands a great wooden pulpit, also wrapped in heavy, rusting chain. People huddle near the platform, and each bears a strange spiral scar burned into his or her forehead.

Bartleby Haff **Level 9 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 400

HP 96; **Bloodied** 48 **Initiative** +8
AC 25, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20 **Perception** +3
Speed 6
Immune fear

Traits

☼ **Insane Litany** ✦ **Aura** 5
All allies in the aura gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls and a +2 bonus to saving throws.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Chain** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized until the start of Bartleby's next turn.

⸸ **Wrenching Chain** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage, and Bartleby pulls the target up to 2 squares. If Bartleby has combat advantage against the target, he also knocks the target prone.

✧ **Chains of Madness** (fear, implement) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and cannot move away from Bartleby (save ends both).

Minor Actions

☽ **Dark Eye of Tharizdun** (fear, implement) ✦ **At-Will,** 1/round
Attack: Ranged 5 (one immobilized creature); +14 vs. Will
Hit: The target goes insane (save ends). While insane, when the target starts its turn, it rolls a d6. On an even number, it acts normally. On an odd number, it becomes dominated by Bartleby until the start of its next turn.

Skills Intimidate +12, Religion +8

Str 20 (+9)	**Dex** 14 (+6)	**Wis** 8 (+3)
Con 16 (+7)	**Int** 9 (+3)	**Cha** 17 (+7)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Equipment chain

Bartleby Haff has been a devout follower of the Chained God for nigh on thirty years. Now, as a wrinkled septuagenarian with an unhinged mind, he sees the horror enveloping Mistwatch as his dark god's doing, an omen that the time of the god's imprisonment nears its end. Each night, Haff climbs to his pulpit and assails the gathered crowds with obscene sermons about how Mistwatch has brought its troubles onto itself by worshiping false gods. The undead represent the end in store for all mortals who do not turn back from their arrogance and embrace their baser natures. "The birds in the sky, fish in the lake, our sheep in the fields—do they sicken, do they die?" he intones.

The locals might have driven Bartleby off, even in these dark days, except that his efforts against the undead seem to work. He owes his success to the magic gained from his god and the undead creatures' inability to stand against it. Haff's followers number about forty people, and none are sick.

Bartleby is insane, but he's useful. He knows that Cadmus Zaspar is also a follower of the Chained God and might brag about his knowledge if goaded or attacked. If the heroes gain Bartleby's confidence, his followers also help combat the undead.

5. Temple of Three

A great temple stands apart from the other buildings. Its outer walls feature mosaics portraying wars and struggles, victories and blessings, but many are damaged or defiled by strange spiral signs. Attached to the temple is a modest cemetery. It is a veritable forest of gray headstones and angelic figures looming over their pedestals.

Father Tomas **Level 7 Leader**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP –

HP 55; **Bloodied** 27; Healing Surges 11 **Initiative** +2
AC 22, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 23 **Perception** +7
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⊕ **Quarterstaff** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 3 damage.

Life Transference (healing) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Melee 1 (one creature); Tomas takes 13 damage and the target regains 26 hit points.

Astral Seal (healing, implement) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: Until the end of Tomas's next turn, the target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses. The next ally who hits the target before the end of Tomas's next turn regains 4 hit points.

Denunciation (implement) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +11 vs. Will
Hit: Until the end of Tomas's next turn, the target is dazed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and defenses.

Sacred Flame (implement, radiant) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 7 radiant damage, and one ally Tomas can see chooses either to gain 5 temporary hit points or to make a saving throw.

Free Actions

Leader (healing) ✦ **2/Encounter**
One ally within 5 squares of Tomas can spend a healing surge.

Skills Heal +12, Religion +10

Str 10 (+3)	**Dex** 8 (+2)	**Wis** 18 (+7)
Con 13 (+4)	**Int** 14 (+5)	**Cha** 14 (+5)

Alignment good **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment robes, quarterstaff, holy symbol

Most gods are honored here, but the Temple of Three, the village's sole temple, holds three gods above the rest. Foremost is Melora, because she is patron to sailors, fisherfolk, and any who depend on the water's bounty. Erathis is next, for she fosters community and keeps the wilderness at bay. Last is Pelor, the light in the darkness. Three magnificent statues depicting these deities stand in the stone and slate temple, and their alabaster forms are painted in gaudy colors. The other gods, deemed lesser figures, are featured in the grand mural on the temple's ceiling.

An old graveyard stands next to the temple, bordered by a wrought iron fence. Gray headstones spotted with moss and lichen rise from the uneven soil, scattered around the mausoleums of Mistwatch's more important citizens. A statue of the Raven Queen stands on a pedestal, her arms outstretched in welcome to those who enter her domain.

Father Tomas runs the temple. He is terrified by the undead and believes the town is beyond hope. What Tomas doesn't know is that the key to saving the community lies beneath the temple. In ancient catacombs long forgotten, the remains of Boris Zaspar are interred. Entombed with the town's founder is a weapon or some other item you deem useful against the undead and Cadmus Zaspar.

Father Tomas can act as a companion character.

6. Widower's Watch

A castle rises from a rock shelf extending out and over the village. High walls encircle the structure, with a turret at each corner. A turret larger than the rest stands in the middle of the wall facing the lake. It offers a view of the town, the surrounding area, and miles of water.

Lord Cadmus Zaspar resides at a stone keep that rises above the village on a rocky protrusion extending out from the hillside. Facing the sea is a 75-foot-tall turret. Attached to the tower and extending north is a simple square, stone keep that is four stories tall and with a blue slate roof. Two chimneys break through

the shingles and gargoyles leer at the corners, vomiting rainwater into the yard below. The structure stands behind 50-foot-high walls assembled from similar stone and hidden behind thick creeper vines.

Cadmus Zaspar is a powerful priest of the Chained God. Though he dabbles in forbidden power, he is lucid compared to Bartleby. Seduced by the dark god when he was just a boy, Cadmus has worked to rise in his master's esteem and extend his own power and influence over the land. He believes he can one day free the Lord of Madness from his prison, bringing about a new age of despair and destruction—a fitting revenge against those who mocked him throughout much of his life.

Zaspar's child-thing is a squalling babe no longer; it is a hulking shadow—a crazed and violent creature of flesh and magic. Cadmus has kept the thing happy by feeding it servants, but he has run out of servants and wonders if the monster will turn against him next. He has come to realize his early zeal might have unforeseen consequences. Now he would give much to rid himself of the creature he spawned.

Cadmus Zaspar **Level 10 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 1,000
HP 200; **Bloodied** 100 **Initiative** +7
AC 24, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 25 **Perception** +4
Speed 6
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Chained God's Wrath (psychic) ✦ **Aura** 3
While Cadmus is bloodied, any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 5 psychic damage, and Cadmus slides the enemy up to 3 squares.

Standard Actions

My Father's Sword (psychic, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage, and one enemy within 3 squares of Cadmus takes 5 psychic damage.

Nightmare Vermin (fear, implement, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +13 vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target cannot shift or make opportunity attacks until the end of Cadmus's next turn.

Unhinging Seduction (implement, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** if the power misses or when this power's effect ends on a target
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +13 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated (save ends).
Aftereffect: The target takes 5 psychic damage.
Miss: The target takes 5 psychic damage.

Madness Beckons (fear, implement, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +13 vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target makes a basic attack against a creature Cadmus chooses. If this attack hits, the target of the basic attack is also stunned (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Unspeakable Revelation (fear, implement, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: Cadmus is first bloodied in the encounter.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 5 (creatures in the burst); +13 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dazed (save ends).
Effect: Cadmus is slowed until the end of his next turn.

Master's Call (teleportation) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅
Trigger: Cadmus is hit by an attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Cadmus teleports up to 1d8 squares.

Skills Bluff +15, History +14, Religion +14

Str 10 (+5)	**Dex** 14 (+7)	**Wis** 8 (+4)
Con 12 (+6)	**Int** 19 (+9)	**Cha** 20 (+10)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Equipment fine clothing, longsword, orb

WHAT IS CADMUS'S SON?

Whatever you want it to be. It could be a demon, or an aberrant monster, or it might not have statistics at all! You can use the son as a bogeyman or as another factor to drive the heroes on in their investigation. The son might be the secret to Cadmus's undoing, gobbling up the father when the heroes have him on the ropes. Or, the son could come to his father's aid, lending its strength to save the father it loves, in its way.

Cadmus only dimly realizes the obsidian disk is responsible for the mayhem unfolding in his streets, but such is his detachment that he scarcely bothers to turn away from his tomes long enough to peer out his window. His distraction stems from his need to either bring his creation under control or find some way to destroy it before it destroys himself.

7. The Sink

This squalid little building, not much larger than a shack, has few redeeming qualities beyond the dim light shining through its windows.

The Sink is the more popular of the two major taverns in the warrens sprawling along the shoreline. It is a crude, wooden building that features one common room with several tables and a few booths along the wall. A bar runs across the back, where casks hold watered-down ale and wine.

The Sink owes its survival to an adventuring band that has set up shop here. Unable to escape because of the shadar-kai, these adventurers have turned their resources to figuring out the curse and ending it. They suspect some necromancer might be behind the troubles, which sheds light on how poorly they have done so far.

The adventuring group might in fact be the player characters if you want to start the adventure in Mistwatch, or it could be a repository of replacement characters for those who fall along the way. This could also be a rival group that tails the characters, perhaps even going as far as sabotaging the heroes' efforts so they can claim victory.

8. Mist Dancer

The only vessel still moored on the docks is a decrepit, one-masted cog. The sail is tattered and full of holes. Steel-eyed people move about on the brightly lit deck, brandishing loaded crossbows your way.

Mist Dancer is a smuggler's ship that had long frequented Mistwatch, moving illicit goods in and out from the town, including certain ritual ingredients, drugs, and other items that Cadmus Zaspar and the cultists in town found useful. The ship put into port a short time ago only to attacked by an undead horde. Captain Cara ordered her sailors to row back the way they had come, but the farther they withdrew into the lake, the more creatures crawled out of the water and scrambled up the hull to slaughter the crew. Cara returned to the wharf to escape being overwhelmed. Now she and her crow brood at the docks.

Cara and her crew are now too few in number to handle the vessel. Her first mate and two mutinous crew members are plotting to kill her, claim her treasure, and make for the lights on the hill, hoping to find safety. They deem anything to be better than facing the things in the fog.

If the heroes befriend Cara, she can reveal troubling information about Cadmus Zaspar, his appetite for occult materials, and her role in supplying them. Winning her over might prompt her to join the heroes as a companion character.

9. Span of Lanterns

Stretching across the rushing river is a great stone bridge. It is lined with statues bearing lanterns; all are unlit.

A 30-foot-wide stone bridge spans the Run, extending about 350 feet. Every 30 feet, on either side, is a stone

Captain Cara	**Level 7 Striker**
Medium natural humanoid, half-elf	XP –
HP 57; **Bloodied** 28; Healing Surges 8	**Initiative** +6
AC 22, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 18	**Perception** +2
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Traits	
Group Diplomacy ✦ **Aura** 10	
All allies in the aura gain a +1 racial bonus to Diplomacy checks.	
Standard Actions	
Rapier (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 8 damage.	
Hand Crossbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 9 damage.	
Double Fall (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one or two creatures); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage, and Cara knocks the target prone.	
Vicious Mockery (charm, implement, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +11 vs. Will	
Hit: 1d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of Cara's next turn.	
Move Actions	
Switcheroo ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: Close burst 1 (Cara and one ally); the targets swap places.	
Triggered Actions	
Striker ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)	
Trigger: Cara hits an enemy that is granting combat advantage to her.	
Effect (No Action): The triggering attack deals 1d6 extra damage.	
Skills Acrobatics +11, Bluff +12, Diplomacy +15, Insight +9, Thievery +11	
Str 11 (+3) **Dex** 16 (+6) **Wis** 8 (+2)	
Con 15 (+5) **Int** 10 (+3) **Cha** 18 (+7)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven, Giant	
Equipment leather armor, rapier, hand crossbow with 20 bolts	

statue depicting a cloaked and hooded humanoid bearing an iron lantern. In better days, the locals placed candles inside the lanterns to light the way.

You can use the bridge as an encounter site where the heroes might confront the shadar-kai on one side and undead on the other.

10. House on the Rocks

A stark tower rises from a rocky island. At night, faint light glimmers through the windows.

A lighthouse and its attached house stand on a rocky island in the bay. The keeper, Philip, survives on rainwater and the fish he catches from the sea. He's too terrified to go ashore or light the tower's main light for fear of attracting the horrors that come out at night.

Characters who reach the lighthouse find a temporary haven on the island, though it won't last forever. The lighthouse might also figure into your adventure as an asset. Shining the tower's light on Widower's Watch could weaken Zaspar or the undead or keep Cadmus's son from interfering when the heroes finally attack. Of course, keeping the light on in the lighthouse will require someone to stay behind to protect it from the undead that are drawn to it and from Philip, who will certainly try to extinguish the light when he sees undead approaching. This might be a job for a hero or one of their companion characters.

Adventuring in Mistwatch

The following adventure hooks provide reasons for the heroes to visit Mistwatch. Each hook also includes a built-in quest and reward for completing it.

Lost Smugglers

In another town not far from Mistwatch, a criminal outfit recruits the heroes to find a lost shipment that disappeared en route to the outpost. The smugglers are not worried about the cargo (at least, not much), but they are concerned about their crime boss's son Kristoff. He was overseeing the shipment when it disappeared. They ask the characters to check out the town, find Kristoff, and bring him home.

Reward: Major quest XP and one treasure parcel.

To Find One Pure Soul

One hero travels to Mistwatch to visit a mentor, family member, retired companion, or loved one. Along the way, he or she encounters the Disciples of Vengeance (see *Dragon* 377), who have mustered a force to erase the town. The character can convince the Disciples to hold off the attack until the character can recover any innocents still remaining.

Reward: Major quest XP.

Naked Ambition

Having heard rumors about what's going on in Mistwatch, a neighboring noble plots to seize Zaspar's land and annex it to her own. Before committing troops, however, she needs scouts to assess the situation. The heroes must infiltrate the town, gauge the threat, and return with useful information.

Reward: Major quest XP and one treasure parcel.

Sample Adventure

The heroes find the town's streets mostly deserted and its buildings dilapidated. Many buildings are abandoned, because their occupants have all died and become undead. Questioning the few locals who congregate at the inns yields a warning that it's not safe to be outside after dark. At nightfall, the heroes come under attack from undead creatures.

More investigation puts the heroes in touch with Father Tomas. From him they learn the town's history, major figures, and the basics about what's going on. Exploring the town reveals more about the noble's story and that the evil seems to become weaker during the day. Eventually, players should realize that the curse can be broken by shattering Zaspar's mirror. The heroes might also discover that light from the lighthouse can weaken the enemies at Widower's Watch enough to give them a chance to reach the mirror. However, undead are drawn to the bright tower light. Unless someone stays at the tower to defend it, undead will swarm to the top and extinguish the powerful lamp.

The adventure ends with the showdown between the corrupted noble and the heroes in the castle while someone simultaneously wages a defensive battle against swarming zombies at the lighthouse (perhaps as a zombie horde skill challenge; see *Open Grave*, page 33). The heroes are in a race against time to destroy the mirror before the Shadowfell can draw the village and its remaining occupants from the natural world into a new domain of dread.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred roleplaying titles for the Dungeons & Dragons® game, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the *d20 system*. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Player's Handbook 3*, *Martial Power 2*, and *Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons*. In addition, he's a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. Robert lives, works, and will probably die in Tennessee.

Updated: January 19, 2011

The Sunken Tower of the Marsh Mystic

By Ray Franklin

An adventure for characters of levels 3-5

Illustration by Slawomir Maniak ✦ Cartography by Jason A. Engle

Halflings have been fishing and hunting in the Great Swamp for generations without serious trouble from the swamp's inhabitants or creatures. But of late, halflings have disappeared while fishing in the swamp. Village leaders suspect that the nearby lizardfolk tribe has something to do with this, but they have no proof. They seek some doughty adventurers who can find and rescue the missing halflings and prevent any more disappearances.

"The Sunken Tower of the Marsh Mystic" is an adventure for characters of levels 3 to 5.

Background

The halflings of the Great Swamp fish the bayou and sell their bounty to the people of the nearby villages. Recently, the halflings began having trouble with a local lizardfolk tribe known as the Snake-Eaters. Several of the halfling fisherfolk have gone missing, and whole families have disappeared from their houseboats. The halflings come to the characters hoping to find someone brave enough to mount a rescue or deliver vengeance if any ill has befallen their missing kin.

Adventure Synopsis

The characters learn the location of the lizardfolk's tower from Toes the halfling. When they reach the site, they can get into the tower by either of two entrances. Inside, they face dangerous lizardfolk plus a young black dragon. Once the inhabitants of the tower are defeated, characters can leave with the surviving halfling prisoners, whom the lizardfolk had been forcing to work at excavating deeper into the sunken city.

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Hooks

Use one of the following hooks or one of your own devising to interest the characters in helping the halflings with their problem.

What? No Fish? Why? The characters, who are either traveling in the area or are based there, hear the locals complaining about the decided lack of fish. Perhaps one of the halflings in the market has very few fish to sell, and she explains the situation when someone asks or complains about the meager assortment.

Where Did She Go? The characters had arranged to meet a specific halfling who is now missing. When they investigate why their contact or friend hasn't shown up, they discover he and other halflings have disappeared in the swamp. The disappearances might be what they were invited to discuss in the first place.

Migratory Lizardfolk: If the characters aren't from the area, they might be drawn to it because of a recent migration into or out of the swamp by a tribe of lizardfolk. Perhaps this tribe has something that the characters need (an item or lost piece of lore), and characters could hear about the halflings' woes when they draw near the swamp to track the lizardfolk down or when they encounter halflings in the bayou.

Starting the Adventure

This adventure uses tiles from *DU3 Caves of Carnage*™ and *DU4 Arcane Towers*™.

Expanding the Sunken Tower

To expand this excursion into the wilds, add an encounter or two outside the entrance to the dungeon utilizing tiles from the *Dungeon Tiles Master Set: The Wilderness* or *Sinister Woods*™. These encounters could include scouting lizardfolk (use the statistics in this adventure to pull together a band), a wraith (if you want to add a touch of undead to the area; see page 284 of *Monster Vault*™), or even a dryad recluse (she won't automatically object to the intrusion of adventurers in her area, so this could become a fun roleplaying encounter; see page 91 of *Monster Vault*). The options below can be mixed and matched however you desire.

- The lower level of the sunken tower could include passages to a sunken castle or to an entire sunken city, if the rumor from Toes turns out to be more true than anyone supposed. Then the small group of lizardfolk encountered here may be part of a much larger tribe living in the remnants of the sunken city. The sunken city could be inhabited by demons and other elementals.
- The tomb of an ancient lizard king named Ssitheesis lies beneath the tower. It is guarded by an army of undead lizardfolk.
- Ssitheesis may not be a dead lizard king but a mighty and terrible draconic god whose temple slowly became a tomb for its followers.

Once characters have decided to look into this matter, introduce them to a halfling known as Toes. He can provide the characters with the precise location of the Snake-Eaters tribe.

Toes can tell the characters the following:
"You're looking for the Snake-Eaters. They live near a ruined tower in the swamp. It's said there's a whole town sunk into the muck there, and only the top of that tower is tall enough to still be seen. Seems unlikely, but there are stranger things than that in the bayou, I suppose. The Snake-Eaters are led by an albino known as Sslury th. He was never much good. Under the old chief, he was just a troublemaker. Now they say that he's taken over, and our kin are disappearing. Coincidence? I don't think so."

Approaching the Sunken Tower

When the adventurers approach the tower, read:
The top of an ancient tower juts out of the marsh. Despite the covering of moss and clinging vines, you can see that it tilts noticeably toward the west. Toppled battlements form heaps of rubble around the tower. A cavelike entrance in one such pile appears to offer ingress to the tower.

If characters choose to go through the rubble entrance, go to Encounter 1.

Characters who have a passive Perception of 14 or higher notice tracks leading around the tower to a different entrance. Go to Encounter 2 if characters follow these tracks. If anyone declared that a character was paying particular attention to the ground, let that character make an active Perception or Nature check rather than relying on passive Perception.

Encounter 1: Knee Deep

Encounter Level 4 (925 XP)

Setup

3 poisonscale magi (M)
2 poisonscale myrmidons (P)
1 blackscale bruiser (B)

The lizardfolk guard the top of the sunken tower, because they expect invaders to come through the rubble-strewn entrance. They guard the trapdoor leading to the lower levels with their lives.

When the characters enter, read:

This was once the upper chamber of a grand tower. Now it is filled halfway to the top with mud and muck, and the whole tower tips to the west as it slowly slips into the soggy embrace of the Great Swamp. Several lizardfolk hiss at your entry, including a black-scaled hulk the size of an ogre!

3 Poisonscale Magi (M) — **Level 2 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) — XP 125 each

HP 32; **Bloodied** 16 — **Initiative** +2
AC 14, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16 — **Perception** +8
Speed 6 (swamp walk)

Standard Actions

Dagger (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage.

Poison Blood (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20; +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 3 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Poison Barrage (poison) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +5 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 3 poison damage, and the target gains vulnerable 5 poison (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and the target gains vulnerable 5 poison until the end of its next turn.

Minor Actions

Corrupt Poison (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature taking ongoing poison damage); +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The poisonscale magus slides the target up to 3 squares, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Skills Arcana +8, Athletics +7

Str 12 (+2)	**Dex** 12 (+2)	**Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 15 (+3)	**Cha** 8 (0)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Draconic
Equipment dagger

2 Poisonscale Myrmidons (P) — **Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) — XP 150 each

HP 47; **Bloodied** 23 — **Initiative** +5
AC 20, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13 — **Perception** +2
Speed 6 (swamp walk)

Traits

Poison Strike
A poisonscale myrmidon gains a +2 bonus to damage rolls against any enemy taking ongoing poison damage.

Standard Actions

Club (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 3 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the poisonscale myrmidon's next turn.

Skills Athletics +9

Str 17 (+4)	**Dex** 15 (+3)	**Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 15 (+3)	**Int** 10 (+1)	**Cha** 8 (0)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Draconic
Equipment turtle shell shield (light shield), club

Blackscale Bruiser (B) — **Level 6 Brute**
Large natural humanoid (reptile) — XP 250

HP 86; **Bloodied** 43 — **Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14 — **Perception** +9
Speed 8 (swamp walk)

Standard Actions

Greatclub (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage, and the bruiser pushes the target 1 square.

Tail Slap ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target falls prone.

Skills Athletics +14

Str 22 (+9)	**Dex** 16 (+6)	**Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 16 (+6)	**Int** 5 (0)	**Cha** 6 (+1)

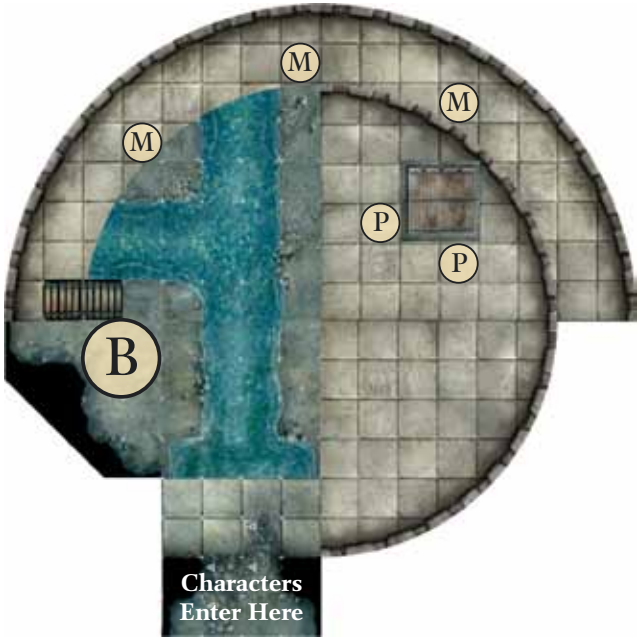
Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Draconic
Equipment greatclub

Tactics

The blackscale bruiser and the poisonscale myrmidons engage the characters in the shallow water and muck in the western half of the room where they can make best use of their swamp walk. The poisonscale magi attack from the upper galleries, using *poison barrage* at the first opportunity when they can catch two or more characters in the burst.

Features of the Area

Illumination: There is no ceiling, so unless the characters attack at night, the area is in bright light. If the characters attack at night, the lizardfolk have lit torches, bathing the area in bright light.



Walls: The walls are made of ancient stone masonry. On the east half of the tower, the walls are largely intact and angled inward enough to make it a difficult climb (DC 21 Athletics). The walls on the west side are crumbling and leaning out a bit (DC 10 Athletics). In some places the lizardfolk shored up the walls using packed mud and grass.

Floor: The floor on the east side is flagstone and slightly angled down toward the west, but not so steeply as to create difficult terrain. The ground on the west side is a mix of dry packed mud, wet mud, and shallow water.

Water: The invading swamp varies in depth from 2 to 3 feet and has a slick bottom of muck and slime. It is difficult terrain for creatures unless they have the swamp walk trait.

Rubble-Strewn Entrance: This is the entrance the characters use if they choose to enter through the mound of rubble. The triangles represent loose rubble; those squares are difficult terrain. The entry was once part of a grand balcony. The lizardfolk used the rubble to form a crude, arching entryway.

Trapdoor: The trapdoor opens to a spiral staircase leading to the area of Encounter 2. When the characters descend, note whether they leave the trapdoor open, because this can affect the illumination for Encounter 2.

Gallery: A gallery runs around the northern half of the tower. Long ago, the gallery circled the entire tower top. As the tower sank into the swamp, the southern part of the gallery collapsed. A 5-foot-high rusting iron railing runs around the interior portion of the gallery and provides cover for creatures standing in a square next to the edge of the gallery. The gallery is 20 feet above the floor of the chamber. The lizardfolk built a crude ladder to access the gallery on the west end. Characters can also reach the gallery by climbing the walls of the tower.

Crystal Levers: At the end of the gallery on the east side of the tower is a set of crystal-tipped levers connected to a portcullis in the hall of Encounter 2. One of the magi uses this device to block egress from the tower when the lizardfolk in this area hear combat from below. This can come into play if the characters follow the path through the swamp and bypass Encounter 1. If characters investigate the levers as part of this encounter, then a DC 14 Arcana check detects that the levers are magical, and a DC 14 Thievery check figures out that the levers open and close a portcullis below this level but not the proper sequence to make it work. Considering their complexity, the levers probably had other uses long ago. Failing the Thievery check results in lowering the door in Encounter 2 and jamming the system. This alerts the occupants of Encounter 2 that they are about to have company.

Encounter 2: Mud and Blood

Encounter Level 4 (925 XP)

Setup

1 mud lasher (M)
2 greenscale darters (D)
2 greenscale hunters (H)

From Encounter 1

Unless the heroes succeed on a Perception check (see below), this chamber at first appears to be empty. The lizardfolk and their elemental ally wait until the characters reach the bottom of the spiral stair before attacking. Do not place any monsters on the map until the characters have succeeded at their Perception checks or the enemies have attacked. In the case of the darters, they are not revealed until one of their attacks hits or the characters succeed on their Perception checks.

As the characters look through the trapdoor from Encounter 1, read:

Rusty, iron spiral stairs are illuminated as the trapdoor opens. The staircase descends 20 feet to a stone landing, beyond which is a large, circular chamber dimly lit by clay oil lamps mudded to the walls. The floor is broken and uneven, and it is partially covered in dirty water and mud.

From the Rear Entrance

If the characters found the back entrance to the lizardfolk's lair, start here. The heroes come in through an ancient hallway that once was part of a surface structure. The masonry walls are shored up and sealed with mud and wattle, which keeps the tunnel relatively dry.

As the characters make their way down the hall, read:

Ahead, you see a dimly-lit, circular chamber. Flanking the entrance are two lizardfolk armed with spears and shields. Beyond the entrance to the chamber, the floor is covered in mud and water.

Stealth Check

DC 19: If characters are trying to be stealthy and at least half of the characters succeed on this Stealth check, the lizardfolk don't try to hide and they can be surprised. If the characters experimented with the crystal levers on the level above, however, then there is no chance for surprise.

Perception Check

If at least half of the characters failed the Stealth check, or they manipulated levers in Encounter 1, then the creatures in this chamber are aware of the characters' approach and hide. They are intimately familiar with this chamber and know the best hiding spots. Characters with passive Perception 21 or higher are aware that other creatures are in the chamber but don't know exactly where. Characters who pause on the stairs to carefully scan the room before entering can make an active Perception check.

DC 14: Several halflings are chained to the walls. They appear to be alive but unconscious.

DC 21: Lying in the mud and almost perfectly blended into it is a vaguely humanoid shape. In the far shadows are two lizardfolk with blowguns, about to attack.

If the mud lasher and the greenscale darters do not detect the heroes' approach, then they are not hiding. They are still difficult to see while they lounge in the muddy water, but the DC 21 Perception check above is reduced to DC 14 and the greenscale darters are not poised to attack.

Mud Lasher (M)	**Level 4 Brute**
Medium elemental magical beast (earth, water)	XP 175
HP 63; **Bloodied** 31	**Initiative** +4
AC 16, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15	**Perception** +9
Speed 5	Low-light vision
Immune disease, poison	
Traits	
Relentless Assault	
A mud lasher gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against slowed or immobilized creatures.	
Standard Actions	
Slam ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.	
Drowning Slam ✦ Encounter	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).	
Miss: Half damage.	
Mud Ball ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +7 vs. Reflex	
Hit: The target is slowed (save ends). If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).	
Triggered Actions	
Amorphous Body ✦ Encounter	
Trigger: The mud lasher is hit by a melee attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The mud lasher shifts up to 3 squares.	
Skills Stealth +9	
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4)	**Wis** 15 (+4)
Con 13 (+3) **Int** 8 (+1)	**Cha** 11 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Primordial	

2 Greenscale Darters (D)	Level 5 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 200 each
HP 50; **Bloodied** 25	**Initiative** +10
AC 18, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 14	**Perception** +9
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	
Traits	
Sniper	
A hidden lizardfolk darter that misses with a ranged attack remains hidden.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Club** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 1 damage.	
➢ **Blowgun** (poison, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 3 damage, and the greenscale darter makes a secondary attack against the same target.	
Secondary Attack: +8 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both).	
Skills Athletics +8, Stealth +11	
Str 13 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 15 (+4)	
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic	
Equipment blowgun with 20 poisoned darts, club	

2 Greenscale Hunters (H)	Level 4 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 175 each
HP 54; **Bloodied** 27	**Initiative** +6
AC 17, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13	**Perception** +8
Speed 6 (swamp walk)	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Spear** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage.	
↯ **Sidestep Attack** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The lizardfolk shifts 1 square and makes a melee basic attack.	
Skills Athletics +10, Nature +8	
Str 17 (+5) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+3)	
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Draconic	
Equipment light shield, spear	

Tactics

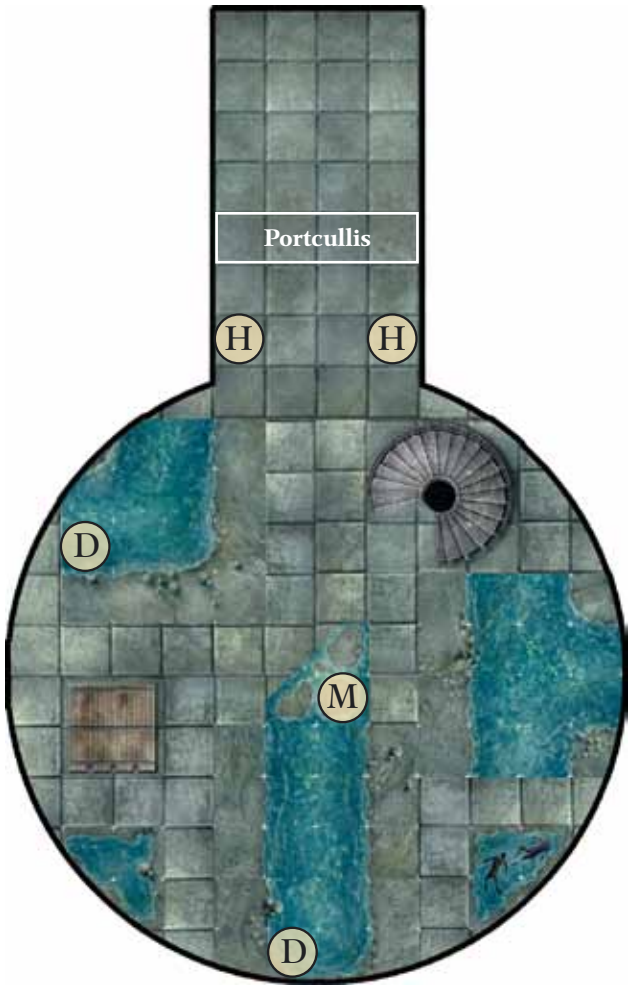
Entering from Encounter 1: If the characters fail their Perception checks, the greenscale darters and the mud lasher wait to attack until the characters step off the spiral stairs. The greenscale hunters are standing guard 6 squares up the hallway (which leads to the rear entrance), out of sight from the staircase. They rush into the battle on the second round. The darters remain at a distance from the characters so that they can utilize their *blowgun* attacks. The mud lasher uses its *mud ball* first, then closes to melee.

Entering from the Rear Entrance: If the characters succeed on their Stealth checks and detect the enemy, they get a surprise round. The hunters make use of their *sidestep attack* to provide the characters with apparent avenues into the chamber and to draw the characters out of the hallway and into the muck. The darters remain at a distance from the characters to utilize their *blowgun* attacks to best effect.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Several oil lamps are mudded to the natural walls of the cavern to provide dim light. If the characters left the trapdoor open and it is daylight above, the spiral stairs and all the squares adjacent to it are brightly illuminated, making it easy for the chamber's occupants to see anyone descending the stairs.

Walls and Ceiling: The walls are made of cracked and crumbling masonry. In places the walls have been mudded up by the lizardfolk to keep too much water from leaking in. Water still seeps through, making the walls slick with moisture. The 20-foot ceiling is crisscrossed with wooden beams that support the floor above.



Floor: When the tower sank, the floor of this chamber buckled, so that it's now extremely uneven. Water oozing from the walls collects in puddles that are a slurry of thick water and thin mud. Tiles that contain water squares (not just the water squares but the entire tile) are difficult terrain; creatures with the swamp walk trait ignore this movement penalty.

The Spiral Stairs: A rusty spiral staircase winds its way down from the ceiling. It creaks and sways under the weight of the characters, but it won't collapse.

Trapdoor: A trapdoor leads to the lowest level of the tower. The door is not locked, but it is waterlogged and quite heavy. Lifting it requires a DC 14 Athletics check, which each character can attempt only once. In the unlikely event that no one manages to heave the door open, characters can still chop through it. Leaving this door open does not affect the illumination in Encounter 3.

Rear Hallway: Characters who use the rear entrance come in along this hallway rather than the staircase. A portcullis in the ceiling is controlled by the crystal levers located in Encounter 1. If any lizardfolk remain on the level above, they will drop the portcullis if they hear combat on this level. Characters can spot the raised portcullis with a DC 10 Perception check. It can be disabled with a DC 14 Thievery check to prevent it from dropping. Once lowered, the portcullis can be lifted far enough for characters to scramble under it with a DC 21 Athletics check, but once released, it will drop to the floor again unless it's propped open.

Prisoners: Seven halfling prisoners (five children and two adults) are chained to the walls. Two other adults have died; their bodies are pickling in a briny pool near the wall. A single prisoner's chains can be wrenched from the crumbling masonry with a DC 21 Athletics check, or the chain's rusting, crudely-made lock can be picked with a DC 10 Thievery check.

Development

After the battle, the characters hear muffled cries for help coming up from the chamber below. The cries are suddenly silenced with a roar. A DC 14 Nature check distinguishes this as the roar of a dragon; DC 21 distinguishes it as the roar of a black dragon. If the characters came through the rear hallway and did not disable the portcullis in the ceiling, the lizardfolk on the level above also hear the roar and drop the portcullis in reaction.

Encounter 3: Scaled Conflict

Encounter Level 6 (1,425 XP)

Setup

Ssluryth, greenscale marsh mystic (G)
Sarkis, young black dragon (B)
2 water traps (P)

This is the lair of the young black dragon Sarkis, who is worshiped as a god by the Snake-Eaters. Ssluryth, the albino marsh mystic, spends a great deal of time here directing captives to excavate the two ancient hallways that extend outward beneath the bayou from this level of the tower. He believes these halls lead to a sunken city.

When the characters descend the stairs, they see that water covers the entire floor, up to armpit level on several adult halflings who are chained to the wall.

Ssluryth has retreated into the tunnels. Sarkis has flattened herself below the surface of the water.

Below this level, the tower is fully flooded by water and mud. A hole in the floor serves as both a hidden trap and as Sarkis's escape route if the fight turns against her.

When the characters open the trapdoor from the level above, read:

The grit-clogged hinges grind open to reveal another spiral stair descending into gloom. A dim globe of flickering light illuminates the stairs and casts dancing shadows along the circular wall, where you see the emaciated forms of at least a half-dozen shackled halflings. Water rises to the halflings' armpits. Two shadowy arches mark tunnels or alcoves leading off the main room. The water ripples ominously as if some large form sank below the surface only moments ago.

Nature Check
DC 14: The halflings are actually seated on the floor, which indicates that the water is about 2 feet deep.

Perception Check
DC 21: A large, reptilian, winged shape lurks beneath the water. For just a moment, a pair of curved horns breaks the surface.

The dragon is hiding in a dimly lit room with which she is intimately familiar. If the characters fail their Perception checks, give the dragon a surprise round when the characters reach the bottom of the stairs.

Ssluryth, Greenscale Marsh Mystic (G) **Level 6 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 250

HP 70; **Bloodied** 35 — **Initiative** +4
AC 20, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 19 — **Perception** +7
Speed 6 (swamp walk)

Traits

☼ **Marsh Blessing** (healing) ✦ **Aura** 2
Allies that start their turns within the aura regain 3 hit points.

Standard Actions

⨁ **Spear** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 2 damage.

✣ **Bog Cloud** (poison) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +9 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 4 poison damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the marsh mystic's next turn.

✣ **Swamp's Grasp** (zone) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target is immobilized (save ends). The zone is difficult terrain until the end of the encounter.

Skills Athletics +10, Nature +12

Str 15 (+5)	**Dex** 13 (+4)	**Wis** 19 (+7)
Con 14 (+5)	**Int** 10 (+3)	**Cha** 12 (+4)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Draconic
Equipment bone breastplate, spear

Sarkis, Young Black Dragon (B) Level 4 Solo Lurker
Large natural magical beast (aquatic, dragon) XP 875

HP 208; **Bloodied** 104 **Initiative** +11
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 15 **Perception**+9
Speed 7 (swamp walk), fly 7, swim 7 **Darkvision**
Resist 10 acid
Saving Throws 5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Acidic Blood (acid)
Whenever the dragon takes damage while it is bloodied, each creature adjacent to it takes 5 acid damage.

Aquatic
The dragon can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.

Instinctive Devouring
On an initiative of 10 + its initiative check, the dragon can use a free action to charge or to use *bite*. If the dragon cannot use a free action to make this attack due to a dominating or stunning effect, then that effect ends instead of the dragon making the attack.

Action Recovery
Whenever the dragon ends its turn, any dazing, stunning, or dominating effect on it ends.

Standard Actions

Bite (acid) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).
Miss: 5 acid damage.

Claw ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +9 vs. AC. If the dragon targets only one creature, it can make this attack twice against that creature
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage.

Breath Weapon (acid) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 3 acid damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.

Shroud of Gloom ✦ **Recharge** ⁞⁞
Effect: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst). Each target gains vulnerable 5 acid and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of the encounter. A character can use a standard action to attempt a DC 10 Heal check to end this effect on himself or herself or an adjacent ally.

Triggered Actions

Tail Sweep ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy misses the dragon with a melee attack.
Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 3 (triggering enemy); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 2 damage, and the target falls prone. In addition, each of the target's allies adjacent to the target takes 5 damage.

Bloodied Breath ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The dragon is first bloodied.
Effect (Free Action): *Breath weapon* recharges, and the dragon uses it.

Skills Stealth +12

Str 16 (+5)	**Dex** 20 (+7)	**Wis** 15 (+4)
Con 12 (+3)	**Int** 12 (+3)	**Cha** 10 (+2)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic

2 Water Pits Level 4 Hazard
Terrain XP 150 each

Detect Perception 21 **Initiative** –
Immune attacks

Triggered Actions

Attack ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: A creature enters one of the pit's four squares.
Attack (No Action): Melee 1 (the triggering creature); +7 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target falls into the pit and is fully submerged in water. The target can escape from the pit by making a DC 10 Athletics check as a move action or by swimming to the surface.
Miss: The target returns to the last square it occupied before entering a pit square, and its movement ends immediately.
Effect: The pit is no longer hidden.

Countermeasures

✦ **Jump:** Athletics DC 20 (this is always a standing jump because of the water; if the jumping creature has the swamp walk trait and a running start for the jump, the DC is 10). *Success:* The creature jumps over the pit.

Tactics

Sarkis starts submerged in one of the water pits. She readies an action and attacks with her *breath weapon* as soon as the characters reach the bottom of the stairs. She then submerges, swims beneath the floor to the other bolt-hole, and spends an action point to place her *shroud of gloom*. She uses the bolt-holes, her swim speed, and her *aquatic* trait to maximum effect. Sarkis happily attacks opponents that fall into the water pits whenever the opportunity presents itself.

In the first round, Ssluryth emerges from his tunnel and uses *bog cloud* on any group of two or more characters. In the next round, he does the same with *swamp's grasp*.

Ssluryth is a fanatic who fights to the death. Sarkis is more concerned with living a long life. She will flee through one of the water pits at her first opportunity when reduced below 25 hit points, or when reduced below 50 hit points if Ssluryth is already dead.

Features of the Area

Illumination: A magical floating globe provides bright light to the spiral stairs and dim light to the remainder of the chamber.

Walls and Ceiling: The ceiling is 20 feet high and made of large stones supported by rotting wooden beams. The walls are made of crumbling stone masonry that is slick with slime.

Floor: The stone floor is slick with slime and algae and completely submerged to a depth of 2 feet, making it difficult terrain for creatures that do not have the swamp walk trait or a swim speed. Below this level is one more level of the tower, which is entirely flooded. That lower chamber is the same size as this one, and its floor is 20 feet below the floor of this chamber.

Water Pits: One of the water pits is marked on the map. The other is in the same squares that are occupied by Sarkis at the start of the encounter. Both pits connect directly to the flooded level below this one.

The Spiral Stairs: The spiral staircase is rusty and groans beneath the weight of the characters. If three characters are on the stairs at the same time, tell players that it is creaking and sagging alarmingly. If four characters are on the stairs at the same time, the staircase collapses. Determine falling damage based on where characters were when the stairs collapsed, and halve it for the water-covered floor.

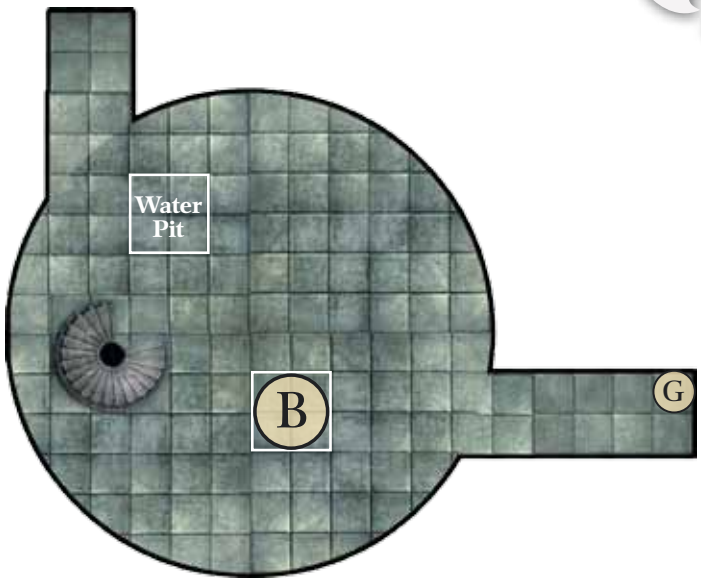
Prisoners: Seven adult male halflings are chained to the walls. There are enough manacles for 15 prisoners.

Side Tunnels: Halfling prisoners are being forced to excavate these tunnels. When the characters arrive, three halflings are down each tunnel. They hide until the fight is over.

Development

If the characters entered the tower by the rear tunnel that leads to Encounter 2 and then proceeded directly to Encounter 3, the enemies from Encounter 1 are still atop the tower. It's up to you whether they wait there to see what happens, possibly ambushing the characters when they emerge from the tunnel or climb up through the trapdoor, or climb down to investigate the ruckus on the second level. Adjust Encounter 1 accordingly. If the characters had an unusually easy time of it thus far, add a bloodseeker drake to Encounter 1. If they are beaten up and weak, consider removing the blackscale bruiser from Encounter 1. Alternatively, the lizardfolk atop the tower may decide that with Sarkis dead or gone, their best option is to escape into the swamp.

Dragon's Hoard: Like most dragons, Sarkis has accumulated a small hoard. Hers is stashed in the flooded chamber at the bottom of the tower. It is up to you to decide how much difficulty the characters have retrieving or even finding the treasure, and what it consists of. It should contain at least three treasure parcels (*Dungeon Master's Guide*®) or three rolls on the Treasure by Party Level table (*Dungeon Master's Book*). Sample dragon hoards can also be found in *Draconomicon™: Chromatic Dragons*.



About the Author

Ray Franklin lives in the zombie-infested suburbs of Atlanta with his wife, daughter, and two cats. He attributes his family's survival to key skills learned from many years as a D&D player and his keen knowledge of the zombie mindset. When not preparing for his Friday night Dungeons & Dragons game, he can sometimes be found prowling the world of Eberron in D&D Online.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S

Eye on the Realms

Gergul and Mithgryn, Body Snatchers Extraordinaire

by Ed Greenwood ✦ illustration by Eva Widermann

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In recent months, necromancers, warlocks, alchemists, and others in the Heartlands who seek bodies and body parts have shared news of two human men who provide the needed ghastly remnants in return for coin. These men are said to be young, agile, armed, and alert for trouble and trade betrayals. Some whisper that they are also fearless and ruthless. Word of the team of Gergul and Mithgryn first got out when talkative priests (or perhaps shocked lay worshipers) spoke of corpses being delivered by night to temples of "dark faiths" for animation into undead.

Most of the rumors agree that Gergul and Mithgryn constantly travel the Realms, in no set route or pattern, robbing graves for grisly wares. They sell the items they uncover to anyone who seeks necromantic ingredients and to those who create constructs, automatons, and undead. According to the tales, the two know the names of likely buyers in many cities, and they often use disguises to conceal their true likenesses—disguises that sometimes incorporate features taken from the corpses they've exhumed.

Some authorities hunt these body snatchers because of local laws against disturbing the dead or to guard against the proliferation of undead and the spread of necromancy. Rumors claim that fell wizards and priests who work with undead are also stalking this pair of grave robbers out of fear that the two will become blackmailers or in the belief that they have committed theft or sabotage in their dealings.

For their part, Gergul and Mithgryn enjoy tricking and occasionally slaying their hunters. Although they prefer quiet anonymity to flamboyance, they plunge into chases, traps, and battle with gusto when the need arises. The truth is, they enjoy their chosen livelihood thoroughly.

From time to time, a rumor claims that they serve this or that dark deity. The two body snatchers dismiss such talk as ridiculous gossip. If asked directly about their intentions, they give the flippant reply, "We're looking for our kingdom!" In the case of Gergul and Mithgryn, that response might be the truth, or it might conceal an unwillingness to set aims. They could be focusing on enjoying

the twists and turns of the dark and occasionally dangerous lives they've forged for themselves.

Othnaer Gergul

The prior professions and personal skills of Othnaer Gergul remain mysterious. He was first heard of as a glib thief-for-hire and a courier of drugs, poisons, and small stolen objects in the ports of Calimshan and the Tashalar. Gergul is a short, thickset man whose skin is tawny, whose brown hair is thinning, and whose emerald eyes gleam. He looks "as sleek and satisfied as a preening cat, when pleased" according to the spice trader Aum Thaerevel of Tharsult.

Gergul is both athletic and agile and is an accomplished player of the harp, the lyre, and the yarting. He is a swift and certain climber, and he can walk or even run on ropes strung from building to building whether they're taut or slack (so it follows that he has a superb mastery of balance). He is a so-so mimic, a convincing actor, and a cautious tactician who anticipates trouble and rarely has fewer than three plans at the ready to deal with it. Those who've dealt with him say that in relaxed moments, Gergul has an air of whimsical humor, cynicism, and playfulness. He's the sort of man who "stirs the trouble-pot just for fun."

Nobody can say when or how he first fell into working with Subras Mithgryn, but the two are unshakably loyal to each other, and they know each other's intentions and natures very well—almost as if they can read each other's thoughts. When not acting another role, Gergul is likely to be smirking and exuding an air of evil glee.

Subras Mithgryn

Taller and thinner of build than his partner Gergul, Mithgryn has a mustache and a short beard (a goatee or "jawline fringe"). He is also more cautious and paranoid than Gergul. Mithgryn thinks ahead, sees likely consequences, and constantly reevaluates local moods and markets. Years of trading in various sundries (shipping and handling small, portable, everyday goods) developed his nose for sniffing out new and changing ways to make money and slowly made him very wealthy. It is only in recent years that he fell into partnership with Othnaer Gergul and took to darker, bolder, and more profitable business dealings.

Like his partner, Mithgryn seems at ease in a life of robbing graves and handling the corpses and body parts of most civilized races and even "monsters." He remains calm in the face of danger and is devoid of moral qualms or squeamishness.

When needed, he uses bladders of gas that confer swift unconsciousness, sleep-poisoned darts, and various knives hidden about his person. He is acrobatic in battle and when a need for a swift escape arises.

Mithgryn is quieter than Gergul, but a better actor. He is accomplished at deceiving others into thinking he's a human female (with the aid of acting, stance, carriage, clothing, masks, and body padding that suggests a female shape). Like Gergul, he is not above using almost anything pulled from a grave to enhance his disguises.

Mithgryn has a sensitive, discerning sense of smell, and he is an expert in the subtle use of scents to hide the reek of decay or spilled blood, to confer moods (such as cozy security or excitement), and to cloak stronger aromas such as from mold, burning, or rotting refuse.

As with his partner Gergul, Mithgryn's past professions, training, and personal skills are known to no one but himself. That doesn't stop people from speculating, of course.

Skull Spies

A recent but persistent rumor about the body snatchers extraordinaire insists that Gergul and Mithgryn can see and hear through skulls they deliver to clients. In other words, from a distance, the two of them can see and hear what the nonexistent eyes and ears of a skull would, based on the location of the skull and the direction it's "looking."

This rumor is true—but it isn't rooted in any mastery of necromantic magic. Rather, Gergul and Mithgryn long ago came across an old Halruaan coffer containing several dozen "spyseals." These enchanted pairs of threads, whose means of making has been lost for centuries, are used to spy upon message recipients and to receive confirmation that a message had been received (plus whatever else could hastily be said).

One thread is hidden or sewn into the binding of a pouch containing the unenchanted message, and the other retained by the sender. When the sender puts the retained thread in a flame and ignites it, he or she can see and hear anything in the vicinity of the matching thread for a minute or so. As the thread burns down, the distant thread vanishes (without burning) at the same rate, and the magic ends when that thread is consumed or extinguished. The magic works in either direction; whichever thread is ignited enables its possessor to see and hear through the other thread. If both are ignited, the magic allows two-way seeing and hearing, but only fleetingly (enabling brief conversations, for example).

The coffer contained instructions for members of the vanished Halruaan family on the use of these spyseals. Gergul and Mithgryn experimented with them and hit upon the idea of hiding one thread in a tooth socket or woven among the intact teeth of a skull, so as to be able to spy upon the skull's recipient. Information that they've gained in this manner has proven useful to them on several occasions, and now they put out "skull spies" whenever they suspect it will profit them. On one occasion, they listened to a fairly lengthy conversation by using half a dozen threads placed in an equal number of skulls that all ended up on a shelf in the back room of a temple.

The Dark Army

On several occasions, one vague rumor has swirled around Gergul and Mithgryn—that they somehow have the ability to take control of undead creatures that are made from the corpses they deliver. Whether they accomplish this by placing something in the corpses ahead of time or through some other magic varies with each particular rumor, but the end effect never changes. One variant of the rumor maintains that the two intend at some point to assemble their own undead army, or at least a local strike force.

These rumors are based on no more than dark suspicions. In an effort to guard against this treachery, several priests have made *very* certain that no magic is hidden in, cast upon, or lingering near the corpses provided by Gergul and Mithgryn.

As it happens, Gergul and Mithgryn are indeed building an undead army—of another sort. They are slowly accumulating stashed and hidden undead (mainly zombies and skeletons of various types) that obey only them. These undead are used chiefly as beasts of burden, but a few are held in reserve to carry out a rescue should Gergul and Mythgryn ever find themselves imprisoned. Most of these undead were created for the body snatchers in lieu of more traditional payment. Gergul and Mithgryn haven't devised any grand schemes involving their "Dark Army" beyond deeming them useful "if anyone determined and capable comes after us" and "if more ambitious plans crop up in times to come."

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the person who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .

Creature Incarnations

Modrons

By Greg Bilsland and Bruce Cordell ✦ illustration by Craig J Spearing

At Gen Con this year, I led a monster design seminar that included Bruce Cordell and Mike Mearls. At the seminar, we promised that one of several old school monsters that had not yet appeared in 4th Edition would be featured in an upcoming article. We let the seminar participants decide which monster that would be, and we spent much of the rest of the seminar discussing story and mechanical ideas for that creature.

Participants overwhelmingly chose modrons, so here they are, updated to 4th Edition. Many of the ideas that ultimately made it into the article came from the seminar participants, so thank you all for your contribution. Enjoy!

–Greg Bilsland

If you weren't one of the lucky few at the seminar, you can listen to our podcast of it at http://tinyurl.com/478l9r4

Living constructs, modrons are a manifestation of the cosmic principle of order in the universe. To be a modron is to be part of a strict hierarchy that is literally built into each one.

Modrons come in many shapes, but the vast majority are regular geometric solids from which protrude arms, legs, eyes, a mouth, and sometimes wings, lenses, and other customized fittings. Common modron shapes are spherical (such as a monodrone) and square (such as a duodrone or quadrone); these two kinds are referred to as base modrons. However, modrons can appear as three-sided pyramids, metallic starfish, and other multisided or multipart (but symmetrical) shapes. The more sides or complexity of parts a modron possesses, the higher its rank in the modron hierarchy; such high-ranking modrons are sometimes called hierarchs. Most modrons have little sense of self, especially base modrons. Modrons do not mate or reproduce as standard creatures do. As living constructs of singular inheritance, they are formed from the permanent disassembly of higher-ranking modrons.

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Resistance Fighters: As literal expressions of law, modrons are in the vanguard of the fight against universal entropy. They battle chaos and its minions (such as slaads and aberrations) wherever they find them. However, modrons are especially concerned with the proliferation of portals across the planes. They see portals as rents and weak points in the fabric of the cosmos, riddling existence like a rotten apple being consumed from within by burrowing worms. Thus, modrons have begun to appear at portal mouths to contest the passage of other creatures. Some modrons allow access if they judge the need important enough, but others adamantly refuse entry. Some contingents have started collapsing passages within and between worlds wherever they find these passages, no matter the purpose of the portal. The one question no one has yet answered with certainty: What if the modrons are right?

Integrated Soldiers: Modrons fight together like a well-oiled machine. Each modron can assemble with others into a more powerful modron, and they can disassemble into separate units as the tactics of the battlefield require. A hierarch modron might take an overwhelming blow only to break apart into a scattering of less powerful but tactically important individual base modrons. Another modron might order those base modrons to create impassable terrain, have them attack specific foes, or perhaps fire them across the field like shot from a catapult.

Primus: This unique individual rules the modrons; it alone understands at a visceral level the intricate structure of the entire modron race. All the modrons that currently exist are individual components of Primus. Its disassembly and renewal each cycle gives rise to thousands of new individual modrons, replenishing those that have perished in the preceding cycle, and perhaps increasing the total number of modrons in the universe. The length of time between marches is determined by the alignment of many different cycles, all of which are tracked on a clock only Primus can read.

Primus's origin is hard to know; perhaps it was a primordial, but unlike most primordials, this vast elemental machine possessed lights that blinked as it clicked, whirred, and belched forth smoke. In the present, the avatar of Primus that most visitors see is a humanoid that rises from an energy pool in its realm, which is known as Mechanus. When Primus appears, bright rainbow hues bathe one hand, and inky dark clouds cover the other hand. Although this version of its form appears relatively small, Primus is of Gargantuan size if it chooses to appear in its true aspect.

Rogue Modrons: All modrons are like cells in the vast distributed body that is Primus, but as in a living body, sometimes cells go their own way and turn cancerous. When disorder strikes at the fabric of the modron hierarchy, a modron might go rogue. The act of going rogue is most common among base modrons; for a modron further up the hierarchy to go rogue, all the base modrons composing it would need to go "bad" simultaneously. Rogue modrons do not act in accordance with Primus's desires. They form their own goals and purposes, and they seek to divorce themselves completely from the One and the Prime. Other modrons hunt down and capture rogue modrons, which are then either destroyed or subjected to a series of experiences meant to reeducate them. Most rogues do not survive the experience, and those that do so manage it only by stripping away their memories of being an individual.

Great Modron March: On a schedule known only to Primus, the Great Modron March spills out across the worlds, traveling a circuit of known existence. No one knows why they do it, but everyone stays out of their way, because when the modrons march, they trample anything without enough sense to get out of their path. The best explanation for the Great Modron March is that it has something to do with Primus's cyclic disassembly into its base parts, and its eventual renewal when a subset of the modrons that participated in the march return to Mechanus and reintegrate themselves. During such vast movement and disruption, something always goes wrong. Worlds that have felt the shudder of collective modron feet might try to prepare for the next march, but only Primus understands the numerous, interlocking cycles whose alignment determines when a march begins.

Monodrone Brickguard **Level 8 Minion Soldier**
Medium immortal animate, modron XP 88

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +9
AC 24, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 20 **Perception** +6
Speed 5

Traits

☼ **Deflective Defender ✦ Aura** 1
Allies have superior cover against ranged attacks while in the aura.

Implacable
An enemy cannot enter the brickguard's space by any means.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Short Sword** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 6 damage.

Wall Tactic ✦ At-Will
Effect: Until the start of the brickguard's next turn, it is immobilized and gains a +5 power bonus to all defenses.

Str 16 (+7)	**Dex** 16 (+7)	**Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 19 (+8)	**Int** 12 (+5)	**Cha** 12 (+5)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment short sword

Duodrone Marcher **Level 8 Soldier**
Medium immortal animate, modron XP 350

HP 54; **Bloodied** 27 **Initiative** +10
AC 24, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 20 **Perception** +6
Speed 5, fly 5 (clumsy)

Traits

☼ **Ordered Defense ✦ Aura** 2
While in the aura, enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls against creatures other than marchers.

Implacable
An enemy cannot enter the marcher's space by any means.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Halberd** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 5 damage. If the target shifts before the start of the marcher's next turn, the marcher can use this attack against it as an opportunity action.

Move Actions

Modron Shift ✦ Encounter
Effect: The marcher ends any slowing or immobilizing effect on it and shifts up to 5 squares, ignoring difficult terrain.

Triggered Actions

From One Come Many ✦ Encounter
Trigger: The marcher drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): The marcher is destroyed, and four monodrone brickguards appear in its space or in an unoccupied squares adjacent to it. These monodrones act on the marcher's initiative and are worth no experience points.

Str 17 (+7)	**Dex** 18 (+8)	**Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 19 (+8)	**Int** 12 (+5)	**Cha** 13 (+5)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment halberd

Quadrone Enforcer **Level 9 Brute**
Medium immortal animate, modron XP 400

HP 72; **Bloodied** 36 **Initiative** +7
AC 21, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 21 **Perception** +6
Speed 5, fly 5 (clumsy)

Traits

Implacable
An enemy cannot enter the enforcer's space by any means.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Spear** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 10 damage, and the target falls prone.

Into the Fray ✦ At-Will
Effect: The enforcer slides a modron minion adjacent to it up to 5 squares to an unoccupied square adjacent to an enemy. When the minion reaches that square, it is destroyed, and one enemy adjacent to it takes 15 damage.

Move Actions

Modron Shift ✦ Encounter
Effect: The enforcer ends any slowing or immobilizing effect on it and shifts up to 5 squares, ignoring difficult terrain.

Triggered Actions

From One Come Many ✦ Encounter
Trigger: The enforcer drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): The enforcer is destroyed, and four monodrone brickguards appear in its space or in unoccupied squares adjacent to it. These monodrones act on the enforcer's initiative and are worth no experience points.

Str 16 (+7)	**Dex** 16 (+7)	**Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 20 (+9)	**Int** 14 (+6)	**Cha** 14 (+6)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment spear

Modron Hierarch **Level 9 Elite Controller**
Large immortal animate, modron XP 800

HP 131; **Bloodied** 65 **Initiative** +6
AC 23, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 21 **Perception** +9
Speed 5, fly 5 (clumsy)
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

All-Around Vision
Enemies can't gain combat advantage by flanking the hierarch.

Implacable
An enemy cannot enter the hierarch's space by any means.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Mace** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.
Effect: The hierarch can slide the target 1 square.

Order from Chaos (force) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close burst 3 (one, two, or three creatures in the burst); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 4 force damage, and the hierarch slides the target up to 3 squares.
Miss: The hierarch can slide the target 1 square.

Fuse Foes (force) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Area burst 1 within 5 (enemies in the burst); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 8 force damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 5 force damage (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage, and ongoing 5 force damage (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Multifaceted Reflection ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy within 10 squares of the hierarch pushes, pulls, or slides it.
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Close burst 10 (the triggering enemy); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: The hierarch ignores the forced movement and slides the target up to a number of squares equal to the triggering forced movement.

From One Come Many ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The hierarch drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): The hierarch is destroyed, and either two duodrones or two quadrones appear in the hierarch's space or in unoccupied squares adjacent to it. Each duodrone or quadrone starts with hit points equal to its own bloodied value. These modrons act on the hierarch's initiative and are worth no experience points.

Str 16 (+7)	**Dex** 14 (+6)	**Wis** 20 (+9)
Con 17 (+7)	**Int** 16 (+7)	**Cha** 16 (+7)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment mace

About the Authors

Greg Bilsland is a producer for Dungeons & Dragons® at Wizards of the Coast. His design credits include the *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide*™, *Monster Manual 2*™, *Monster Manual 3*™, and *Vor Rukoth*™. His recent editing credits include *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™, *Rules Compendium*™, and the *Dark Sun® Creature Catalog*™. He keeps a gaming blog at gregbilsland.wordpress.com and is active on Twitter (@gregbilsland).

Bruce R. Cordell is an Origins and ENnie award-winning game designer whose long list of professional credits include *D&D Gamma World*™, *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*™, *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide*™, *Prince of Undeath*™, and *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*™. Bruce is also an author of Forgotten Realms novels, including the Abolethic Sovereignty series and Sword of the Gods series. Find him online at brucecordell.com.

More than Stats

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland
Illustrations by George Simeonov "Calader"

You've mastered making monsters. You have a good grip on traps. You can even write lengthy skill challenges when you should have been doing your homework. But can you challenge players where it really hurts? Can you challenge their . . . characters?

The Dungeons & Dragons® rules typically concern themselves with action resolution. When a battle occurs (and it will) or when skills are challenged, we have rules to determine success. As many veteran Dungeon Masters will tell you, challenging characters in different ways—in story ways—is what really elevates a game from a series of brawls to something memorable. This month, we look at some tricks and tactics to help you present your players with a challenging story that calls on them to make meaningful decisions beyond whom to stab next.

Know Your Players

Dungeon Master's Guide® 2 contains a section on player motivations (pages 42-49) that is a great primer for getting to know your players. Look around your table; are there actors, explorers, instigators, power gamers, slayers, storytellers, thinkers, and watchers? Placing each of your players into one of these categories helps you to tailor encounters to the type of experience your players want.

Of course, most players have aspects of each of these types in varying mixes, so you can go a step further and rate each player in each category. I use a 0-to-5 scale. A 0 means the player has no interest in that activity. A rating of 2 or 3 means that the player enjoys that game style but doesn't thrive on it, like the way someone who loves deep-dish Chicago-style pizza can still enjoy a New York slice. A rating of 4 or 5 goes to the play styles that really get the player excited and fully engaged in the game.

Here is an example of one of my players.

Player 1	
Actor	4
Explorer	2
Instigator	2
Power Gamer	2
Slayer	3
Storyteller	5
Thinker	4
Watcher	0

Player 1 is not a watcher. She will never take a back seat and is always in the front of the decision-making process. She loves to inhabit her character; she loves cogitating on what could be going on behind the scenes and wants to be part of the story. She can

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kick ass and min/max as well as anyone and loves to figure out the best combination for her powers, but she's not really a power gamer; those are just tools that let her manifest her character and perform well in an overall sense. Battles are fun, but she wants to win the war by figuring out which story actions are more correct than others.

Casual DMs do this kind of analysis on a low, seat-of-the-pants level. Veteran DMs do this math constantly, instinctively, on an almost subconscious level. Careful DMs write it out as I did above. If you're a newer DM or you've never thought about your players this way, sitting down with paper and pencil and analyzing your players can open your eyes to why certain things work in your game and others don't. Even veteran DMs who think they know their players' every mood and whim might want to give this a shot. Reviewing that section of *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* could jostle some ideas, freshen up your encounters, and raise the energy level around the table.

Knowing your players, however, is only half of the equation. You also need to . . .

Know the Characters

Most player characters are reflections of their players' personalities. Only those who rate high on the actor scale tend to play characters that are nothing like themselves. At the same time, we're talking about roleplaying games, and most players do enjoy exploring characters that are at least partly different from themselves. My wife is not an avid D&D player, but when she does play, she always plays a hulking half-orc. My wife is nothing like a half-orc; I open all the jars and bottles in my house. But that's the fun. She gets to play someone physically intimidating and incredibly strong—two things that she isn't.

It's important to evaluate how the character is different from the player. Some players make this evaluation easy. They provide detailed character descriptions. They choose backgrounds and themes because of what they add to the story, not for their mathematical benefits. They want you to know what their character is about.

Sometimes this can be daunting to a DM. Reading pages of rambling background and genealogy tables and listening to tales about a character's childhood (we all have "Let me tell you about my character" horror stories to relate) can just seem like more work to an already busy DM. It is tempting to tune out this information. Don't; instead, find ways to focus it.

The player who delves into this kind of character detail is a minority. Players are busy, too. Many might like to bring their characters to life with this kind of development, but the demands of school, a job, or a family leave them with scant minutes to level up their characters, print them, and race to the game.

What you need is a happy medium between the players who inundate you with more character info than you care to know and those who provide little more than their attack bonus and AC. A great place to start is with some questions, such as:

1. How does your character get along with people? With strangers or people of other races?
2. How does you character get along with creatures of other species?
3. Is your character part of an organization? Does he or she want to be?
4. How does your character view his or her alignment and opposing alignments?
5. What is your character's main goal right now? What is your character's long-term goal?
6. What or who does your character love?
7. What or who does your character hate or strive against?
8. What is your character's greatest secret?

It may be tempting to send out such a questionnaire to players via email and tally up responses. You'll get tons of information . . . from the players who get around to sending the answers. They're probably the same people who already wrote up detailed character histories. What's more, you'll be the only person who sees the information, but you're not the only one who can benefit from it.

There is a better way. Ask one or two of these questions before each session starts. Give each player a turn to answer, and let other players ask questions, too. This provides you with a better grasp on the character beyond the stats and fills in important character details for everyone's benefit. You probably know quite a bit about your friends; D&D characters ought to know as much about each other. At the very least, this exercise improves in-story banter around the game table.

While players are swapping stories about their characters, probe for more details and take notes. (Why were you were banished from the thieves' guild? How are you related to the great dragon of Misty Lake?) You could also record the conversation to analyze later with fewer distractions.

Then, put these details to use. Weave them into your stories. Imagine the characters as people you know, not just numbers on paper. Envision how they would act in specific situations: not only in combat, but in negotiations, personal crises, and when dealing with people they like or dislike.

Most important, develop an understanding of how each character resembles and differs from the player.

One of the questions above shouldn't be asked at the table, and that's question 8. Would you announce your greatest secret in front of all your friends just to raise the level of drama in your life? We all know a few people who would (and do), but once you do, it's not a secret anymore. So ask that question privately or via email.

Questions 1, 6, and 7 are great to ask at the start of a convention event. The answers clue you in to important information that can tweak any roleplaying encounter toward the personalities of the characters. The trick to having great interactions with nonplayer characters is tailoring roleplaying notes aimed at generic adventurers for the particular personalities of the characters at the table. The result is less wooden, more interactive NPCs.

The Twist

So what can you do with all this information?

First, you'll gain a great grasp of what the players want in a game, and how to personalize your challenges for the characters. That's powerful stuff.

More important, you know each player's comfort zone. Giving players what they want is key to success. It's true that D&D games trade on power fantasies, but tough combats aren't enough to keep the story alive. Hard choices can be every bit as challenging.

For example, imagine a typical "save the princess" scenario. What happens if the princess is a sister of one of the characters? What happens when the characters finally reach her only to find out that she doesn't want to be rescued? What if the villain who is plaguing the land has actually won her love? What if exposure to him has tainted her forever, but she hasn't yet committed any acts of evil? These aren't abstract questions when characters are placed in a position where they must choose an answer and act on it, and their decision affects other lives. They might be fictional lives, but they still have emotional weight with most players.

These kinds of challenges are very fitting for a lawful good character or a character whose family means everything. That character might need to go against the wishes of one family member to please the rest. Players will try to make the best of the situation. They will try to make everyone happy, and they might succeed for a short time.

It's up to you to use what you know about the characters to inject conflict into the story until the characters are faced with compelling choices, competing choices, and most importantly, hard choices.

There's a kicker to all of this. Some characters are stone cold mercenaries. All they care about is money and anything that grants them more combat power. You can still confront them with hard choices, but the moral components of the choices might need to be turned up to 11 or even reversed. What if the princess from the previous example has become evil, but she is also a player character's sister? Alternatively, morality could be removed from the equation entirely by making the choice a conflict between two things the characters value. What if characters can collect their reward only by bringing the princess back alive, but she is so powerful that the odds are against everyone surviving the trip? How will characters react if they are offered wealth and power to betray their fellow adventurers? History and fiction are full of double-crosses arising from the seductive forces of wealth and power.

Finally, know when to limit this sort of conflict. You don't want your players always at each other's throats, but having that occur occasionally makes for great drama. It is also important not to take every scrap of information that players give you and turn it against them. Do this too often, and players will stop telling you anything or only add details of the most innocuous kind. This is especially true for question 8. Character secrets are the aces up your sleeve. Even if you never use them, just hinting at them from time to time builds tension and keeps characters on their guard. That can lead to great roleplaying and story development all by itself.

The Mailbag

It's time to look into the mailbag. The following questions come not from the Save My Game group but from players who cornered me at shows, through email, and Facebook. If you have a question, feel free to track me down by hook or by crook, but the best method is still the Save My Game group.

This month, I'm focusing on questions about the metagame end of things.

Hard Time with NPCs

I'm having a hard time with my NPCs. No matter how hard I try, they all seem dull and wooden to my players. It is so bad that they have a hard time telling them apart when I roleplay them sometimes. What can I do to make my NPCs seem more alive?

–The Wooden DM

There are many tricks that will add dimension to nonplayer characters. Finding an illustration to represent the NPC helps. I find that visualizing NPCs is instrumental in having a deeper understanding of them. It also helps determine their mannerisms. A disheveled fighter acts differently from a well-dressed wizard. People often stroke beards or play with long hair, jewelry, or adornments on their clothes. The act of describing these things or even acting them out gives your players a stronger sense of that NPC's personality.

Try using the questionnaire presented earlier in this column to flesh out your NPCs. If that doesn't work, try casting the character. We all have favorite actors; imagine your NPC as played by that actor. You don't need to perfect that Sean Connery accent you've been working on secretly for years (but you can if you want). Just imagine that actor in the role, and your NPC is likely to pick up the traits you want.

Focus, People, Focus

My players are always metagaming. They will not deal with my story as a story. They always try to figure out how I would design things rather than dealing with each challenge I set up as part of a long-running story. The really heartbreaking part is they are extremely successful with this tactic. What can I do to get them to stop?

–Metagamed Out

You'll never get players to stop metagaming entirely, especially if it is a tactic that works. D&D players will game the system as well as any video game player, and with as much blatant disregard for your intent. What you really need to do is second-guess yourself when you are designing your adventures. After outlining your next session, take a hard look at that outline. At each decision point, ask yourself, "Are there other possibilities here?" Look at other adventures to see how they deal with story and decision-making. Don't be afraid to steal ideas, even from material for other games. Some of your best ideas on how a game should run can come from a close examination of how other people have solved the same problems. If you can pick up new tricks, new twists, and new adventure formats, then you can keep your players on their toes and they will have a harder time metagaming your design.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland caught the D&D bug at an impressionable age. Once the content manager for the RPGA and a developer for the 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons rules, he is now a freelance game designer doing work for Wizards of the Coast and Paizo Publishing, and he is part of a fledgling group of game commentators and game designers called NeoGrognard. During the daylight hours, he teaches game production classes at the International Academy of Design and Technology of Seattle.

CHAOS SCAR™

The dwarf runepriest Olek Dael, devoted worshiper of Bane, intends to call an avatar of his god by scribing ancient, forbidden runes. Unknown to him, primordial threats, bound by the sanctity of these runes, strain the borders of their prison dimension. The more Olek uses his runes, the weaker the wards become. Olek's followers, empowered by the forbidden runes, challenge the adventurers as they struggle to avert catastrophe.

HEROIC 1–10

The Runecutter's Ruin

An adventure for characters of 8th to 10th level

By Logan Bonner ✦ Illustration by Paul Bonner ✦ Cartography by Jason A. Engle

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Background

Trained in the art of rune smithing by devotees of Erathis, the dwarf runepriest Olek Dael grew frustrated by the slow expansion or, at times, the contraction of civilization. Stymied by opposition at every turn, the votary had what he considered an epiphany: Force employed in service of order and light was far better than rampant chaos and darkness. If people would not listen to reason and work together, civilization must be imposed on them. The god of conquest, Bane, offered exactly what Olek so desperately sought.

From his training, the fanatic knew about the ancient runes used in the Dawn War. Although the laws of rune smithing expressly forbade taking advantage of such tools, the dwarf was convinced that he was strong enough to command them. Using the runes, Olek would call down an avatar of Bane to lead an army dedicated to order.

Casting about for a location to stage his triumph, Olek settled on the Chaos Scar. The meteor was a clear sign from Bane and a monument to his divine power. The lawlessness of the area made it the perfect spot to engrave his runes and conduct his rituals devoted to order. With the avatar by his side, the various, warring creatures already present at the Scar would make an unstoppable army.

As a first step, Olek joined the Brotherhood of the Scar, finding willing allies in that evil cult. The runepriest began using the ancient runes regularly, believing that he was binding his allies into a cohesive unit. He rose through the ranks, bringing prominent lieutenants under his command.

Unknown to Olek, the runes are part of a warding mechanism that keeps a number of primordials trapped in a prison of dreams. The runic words hold great power, but using them drains that power and weakens the ensnaring thought-construct.

Olek's careful plans and monomaniacal focus have borne fruit. His magical might approaches an apex, just as the first primordial begins to tear through the walls of the divine prison.

Adventure Synopsis

After discovering Olek or his runes (suggestions are detailed in "Starting the Adventure" below), the adventurers follow the clues to a grove of statues. There, they encounter one of Olek's lieutenants—Ptolema the medusa—guarding the entrance to the runepriest's library. She calls on her ally, a tiefling occultist, to activate protective runes placed on the statues in the grove.

After defeating the medusa and her statues, the adventurers descend into a runic library protected by Jorag, a hobgoblin lieutenant, and his underlings. Once the guards are defeated, the heroes find diagrams and plans showing where Olek plans to complete his ritual calling.

BEFORE THE ADVENTURE

With a bit of planning, you could better integrate this adventure into your campaign. Start by scattering the mysterious runes about during prior sessions as noted in the "The Signs Are All Around Us" adventure hook. Perhaps a courier bringing a message to one of the adventurers' enemies moves inhumanly fast, bolstered by one of Olek's runes. Maybe oddly shaped and ancient runes appear from time to time, carved on walls and objects, giving the characters a faint sense of unease as they pass.

The dwarf toils on a rise miles away, carving the last runes on the standing stones that circle the hilltop. When the adventurers confront him and his gargoyle guards, Olek desperately calls upon his most powerful rune. It makes him more formidable, but also weakens the extradimensional prison enough that a primordial begins to emerge.

Starting the Adventure

As a priest of an evil god, a member of the Brotherhood of the Scar, and an unknowing dabbler in primordial magic, Olek has made a number of enemies. These hooks describe a few of the ways the adventurers might get wind of the runepriest's depredations.

Hook: In the Name of Erathis

Lord Drysdale, paladin of Erathis and ruler of Restwell Keep (see "The Keep on the Chaos Scar" in *Dungeon* 176), knew Olek Dael before the dwarf deserted Erathis to worship Bane. Tales of his former ally's fall from grace reached the paladin, and he feels responsible for stopping Olek. Unable to see to the task himself, Drysdale seeks adventurers well versed in religion (whether they worship Erathis or not) and capable of tracking down the dwarf.

Quest XP: 400 XP per character (major quest) if the adventurers bring back Olek Dael, preferably alive. Drysdale also offers a reward of 2,500 gp.

Hook: The Signs Are All Around Us

One of the party members who has training in Religion, or an ally with knowledge about the divine, finds a series of extremely powerful divine runes during the several sessions before this adventure starts. Whenever encountered, the runes feel subtly

wrong. They do not radiate evil. Instead, they give the impression that they shouldn't be seen by mortal eyes—as if they were never meant to be used. The adventurers might discover these runes on documents or people traceable back to Olek or his library.

A character who succeeds on a DC 16 Religion check identifies the symbols as powerful versions of the runes common to runepriests. On a result of 24 or higher, the adventurer realizes the runes are an active part of a sealed primordial prison and have been weakened through overuse. A runepriest gains a +5 bonus to this Religion check and, if successful, knows the runes are forbidden.

Quest XP: 400 XP per character (major quest) if the adventurers track down the source of the runes and stop Olek.

Hook: Power Games

Olek's high position within the Brotherhood subjects him to the intrigues that run rampant through that baleful organization. An unscrupulous party (or one willing to go undercover) could accept a job from Hunter Keldos, a gruff human warrior who wants to improve his position in the Brotherhood's ranks. Although doing so breaks the Brotherhood's edict that its activities remain secret, Keldos has put word out that he seeks the removal of a rival.

Quest XP: 400 XP per character (major quest) if the adventurers kill Olek and return his important records to Keldos.

The Forbidden Runes

Each of Olek's lieutenants received a rune for serving the runepriest faithfully. Both a blessing and a curse, each rune provides supernatural powers but costs its bearer dearly.

The runes have a life of their own—more an instinctual compulsion than true sentience. When a rune's owner dies, the mark passes to a nearby creature that it can "help." The rune jumps from host to host like a disease, granting power as it does so.

Olek and his lieutenants in this adventure, Ptolema and Jorag, possess runes. Each rune's boon and curse are included in their stat blocks. The runebound creature gains both the curse and the boon.

When the runebound creature dies, the rune appears on the arm of a nearby creature, searing the flesh in a specific pattern. The deceased former host turns into a water elemental (*Monster Manual* 3, page 83). The elemental is conscious, has full hit points, and is controlled by the DM. A character who dies as an elemental can be raised from the dead in his or her original form.

Removing the Runes: Cure Disease and other methods of removing ill effects cannot overcome the power of the ancient runes. Only one certain method of removing the runes exist: Upon the defeat of the primordial Hoshotath (see **Encounter 3: The Shattered Prison**), the runes dissipate from their hosts.

Rune of Poison (Ptolema)

Rune of Poison's Curse: If the runebound creature moves more than 4 squares on its turn, it becomes weakened until the end of its next turn.

Rune of Poison's Boon — Rune Utility

The runic marking on your flesh burns and steams, enhancing your strike with blazing green poison.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Poison
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You hit an enemy with an attack using a weapon.
Effect: The enemy takes ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The ongoing damage increases to 15.
Second Failed Saving Throw: The ongoing damage increases to 20.

Rune of Banefire (Jorag)

Rune of Banefire's Curse: The runebound creature takes a –2 penalty to AC.

Rune of Banefire's Boon — Rune Utility

Ethereal flames burst from your skin, surrounding you in a protective embrace.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Fire
Minor Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must be bloodied.
Effect: You gain a +2 bonus to AC, and each enemy that ends its turn adjacent to you takes 10 fire damage. Roll a d20 at the start of each of your turns. On a 9 or lower, the effect ends. The effect otherwise ends at the end of the encounter.

Rune of Command (Olek)

Rune of Command's Curse: When the creature bound to the rune rolls a natural 5 or lower on its first attack roll during a turn, it is dominated by Hoshotath (see **Encounter 3: The Shattered Prison**) until the end of its next turn.

Rune of Command's Boon — Rune Attack

The signs covering your upper body reverberate, imbuing your voice with divine power.

Encounter ✦ Charm, Divine
Standard Action **Close** burst 1
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: +15 vs. Will
Hit: You dominate the target until the end of your next turn.

Hoshotath, the Flaming Sea

Made up of equal parts fire and water, the primordial Hoshotath is conflicted and unpredictable. Its mind lurches from being serene, like a placid lake, to implacable, like a tidal wave, to tumultuous, like a raging fire. At times, the gods and other primordials were able to reason with Hoshotath. More often, it left widespread ruin in its wake, causing atrocities on a massive scale. Before the Dawn War, a cadre of other primordials kept the Flaming Sea in check. When war broke out, it was unleashed.

During the Dawn War, Hoshotath set about transforming the oceans of the world into roiling lava. The gods managed to counter this devastating event, but two deities lost their lives in doing so. Other gods drew from their own divine force to craft a set of powerful runes that could turn the Flaming Sea's mind upon itself. So strong was the resulting thought-construct that it proved able to contain not only Hoshotath but several other primordials. The gods knew, however, that the runes were not inexhaustible. Out of fear that the prison would shatter, the deities commanded that the potent runes never be used again.

The Runic Library

After the adventurers get wind of Olek's plans, they must locate his sanctum—a runic library hidden in a small dungeon he cleared out nearly a decade ago. Although Olek calls the place his library, the adventurers won't find books or scrolls there. Instead, runes cover the floors and walls. Most of the marks are reference points, lacking a few touches that would make them active. The place is described in more detail in **Encounter 2: The Runic Library**.

You can use the optional **Following the Tracks** skill challenge to plot the adventurers' search for the library. Alternatively, you can devise your own investigation and results based on the information provided in that section.

When the characters arrive near the library, they find Olek's lieutenant Ptolema standing guard on the earthen cliff near the entrance. The fight against her is presented in **Encounter 1: Grove of Statues.**

If she's defeated, the adventurers can descend the stairs to find Jorag, another of Olek's lieutenants. They face him and the wards within the sanctum in **Encounter 2: The Runic Library**.

Olek's Trail

After defeating his champions, the adventurers discover that Olek isn't at the runic library. Either by rummaging through his papers or by interrogating his lieutenants, the heroes can learn the runepriest's whereabouts.

Olek's Papers: In a side room of the library behind a locked door (Thievery DC 18 to open), the runepriest's papers lie scattered across a long wooden table. Each of the sketches directly in front of the chair features a diagram of a set of standing stones, with a series of runes written beside the stones. Several versions are stacked in a pile, each with some sections scribbled out, suggesting that Olek was unsatisfied with it. A small map, drawn crudely by someone other than the creator of the diagrams, shows the area near the runic library and a path that leads to a hill to the west. The map depicts the same circle of standing stones as the diagrams.

Interrogation: Ptolema and Jorag initially refuse to give out any information. A hefty bribe or a promise of freedom backed by a convincing threat persuades one of the two lieutenants to part with information on Olek's whereabouts. Both subordinates know that Olek headed west with his rune-smithing tools and camping supplies. Beyond that, they are not privy to the details of his plan. He has been heading off to the west to work repeatedly over the last few weeks, but has kept quiet about where he's going. If the adventurers pursue to the west, a DC 26 Perception check allows them to track Olek's movements.

The Runic Stones

The trip to the hill where Olek works consumes hours. If the adventurers decide to take an extended rest along the way, they see threatening, unnatural clouds ahead of them. This swirling miasma indicates that Olek has almost completed his nefarious activities. If the party rests, he'll finish it with time to spare!

As the adventurers come within sight of the hill the stones stand on, they see strange, blue-tinged storm clouds gathering. They flash with red-orange sheet lightning. At odd moments, when the lighting is just right, the clouds take on a vaguely humanoid shape, reaching down toward the hill ahead.

Upon the hill, Olek chants divine words of power. When the adventurers ascend the hill, read the text at the start of **Encounter 3: The Shattered Prison**. If they take a measured approach and try to talk to Olek, consult the "Parley with Olek" sidebar.

Conclusion

If the adventurers defeat Olek without killing him, they can take him to an authority such as Lord Drysdale for imprisonment or deal with him on their own terms. The runepriest's defeat does not change his goals, however. If the adventurers let him go, he's likely to turn up again with more power and a more baleful plan.

PARLEY WITH OLEK

It could be easy to paint the runepriest as a madman, but he's following a rational, if misguided, path. He chose to follow Bane not because he "turned evil," but because he thinks conquest is the only way to form an ordered society out of the unrelenting chaos of the world. Olek knows little about, and never planned to release, the primordials. He sincerely believes he can control the ancient runes and has no idea why they were forbidden.

Olek could be willing to negotiate with the heroes, but not if it's clear they've been beating up his lieutenants. He instantly recognizes the runes he's placed and considers anyone bearing the Rune of Poison or Rune of Banefire as an enemy.

If the adventurers aren't obviously antagonists and try to negotiate, Olek listens for only a short while before returning to his chanting. If they are disguised as followers of Bane or members of the Brotherhood of the Scar, the adventurers could engage Olek's attention a bit longer. Even so, he has little patience for anyone who opposes his plan to establish an orderly society through Bane's conquest.

If the adventurers offer religious arguments that explain how Olek's rune smithing could set a primordial loose, they might convince him to stop what he's doing. But no one can dissuade him from his ultimate goal. If he's unable to bring about Bane's conquest through the ancient runes, he'll find another way.

After the Adventure

The events of this adventure can influence the future of your game.

Primordial Echoes: Although the adventurers sent Hoshotath crawling back to its prison, the primordial's partial presence in the world has set forces in motion. Just as its "hands" left elementals behind, its body infested the Chaos Scar with elemental threats. Use elemental creatures in future encounters in the Chaos Scar and create elemental hazards spawned by Hoshotath's presence in other locations.

The Flaming Sea Unleashed: If the adventurers failed to stop Hoshotath from escaping its prison, the primordial rampages through the countryside. Still weak from atrophy and the strenuous escape, the primordial can be defeated without setting off a new Dawn War. The adventurers need to act quickly, however, and gain outside assistance if they're going to return the Flaming Sea to imprisonment.

The Chained God: Similar runes helped to bind Tharizdun. A part of that monstrosity's mind began to stir when the great runes binding Hoshotath were overtaxed. His cultists begin to see visions calling them to reclaim Olek's runes and to begin freeing trapped primordials, paving the way for their master's release.

Cleaning up the Lieutenants: Ptolema and Jorag were not the only members of the Brotherhood of the Scar to serve Olek. Additional lieutenants could be devised to challenge the adventurers. With Olek's defeat and Hoshotath's rebinding, these former subordinates have lost their runic advantages. They are desperate to regain some measure of the power Olek had granted them. With nothing to lose, they make reckless power grabs both within and outside the Brotherhood.

Skill Challenge: Following the Tracks

Once the adventurers hear about Olek or learn about the runes, they'll need to find his location. Depending on how much time you have and the preferences of your players, you can handwave these events and simply move straight to the runic library; drop clues for them to follow, such as runes in places they've been or with people they know; or use this skill challenge.

Level: 9 (XP 400)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

Setup

This challenge assumes the adventurers have found some of the runes, but don't know who Olek is. If they've already been specifically told about the runepriest (possibly by Lord Drysdale), they start with 1 success in the skill challenge.

Urban or Rural: The challenge posits that the characters are investigating in Restwell Keep or another settlement. If they're in the wild or a dungeon, you'll need to make major changes, the least of which is any opportunity to use Streetwise.

Strategies

This section describes some of the strategies the adventurers might try and the associated checks you can call for.

Find Rune Smiths: The adventurer tries to find out who in the area knows how to scribe divine runes. The character can attempt either a DC 17 Streetwise check to ask around or a DC 25 History check to recall the name Olek Dael. Either result gives 1 success. You can use the same checks and results if the character looks for members of the Brotherhood of the Scar.

Keep an Eye Out: The adventurers make a DC 12 Perception group check. If the group check succeeds, the heroes gain 1 success. Choose one adventurer who succeeded on the check. That character notices a person who bears a rune (possibly a messenger or a mercenary) moving about nearby.

Sense Runes: This option, open only to an adventurer trained in Religion, allows the character to reach out mystically and sense the presence of divine runes. With a DC 17 Religion check, the character "feels" the nearest one of Olek's runes not yet discovered. Roll a d20. On a 10 or higher, the adventurers find a note inscribed by Olek or a person bearing a rune granted by Olek. This discovery nets the party 1 success. On a 9 or lower, the heroes find a rune unassociated with Olek offering no information useful to their mission (the background of that particular rune is open to the DM's devising).

Follow the Runed One: If the adventurers find someone who bears a rune (by succeeding on "Keep an Eye Out" or "Sense Runes," for example), they can track that person. Have the adventurers following the runebound person make a DC 12 Stealth group check. If they fail, their quarry notices them and leads them astray, resulting in 1 failure. Otherwise, they gain 1 success. If they capture the person who has the rune, they can use interaction skills to press him or her for more information. The "Quick Followers" detailed below have their attitudes described in their entries.

Consequences

Success: The adventurers learn that Olek Dael, an accomplished runepriest, maintains a library in a grove of statues. They also discover where the library is located.

Failure: The adventurers learn the location of the runic library, but the dwarf or one of his allies notices the party's efforts. The heroes face tougher odds when they arrive at the library. Add another minotaur charger (see Encounter 2) to each encounter. Don't award extra XP for defeating these additional monsters.

Carefully monitor the adjustments in encounters resulting from the runes and from failing this skill challenge. Adding a minotaur to each encounter might make them too difficult, particularly for lower-level parties. In that case, other penalties could be opening the encounters with the characters surprised or with their opponents in more advantageous positions.

QUICK FOLLOWERS

Some results indicate that the adventurers see a person whom Olek has blessed with a rune. The short descriptions below can be used if you need to roleplay a runebound creature on the fly.

Tavitz Patrella: This teenage human boy accepts messenger jobs from Olek. The boy's rune gives him greater endurance for the long trips (usually on foot, though he sometimes "borrows" a horse) between clients. (If the characters follow him over a long distance, they must succeed on a DC 15 Endurance group check or they lose him.) Tavitz suspects that the dwarf is involved with dangerous people, but keeps his nose out of it. He's sarcastic and unhelpful, but open to outright bribery (300 gp or so).

Victory: Bound to Olek by a common devotion to Bane, the tiefling priestess named Victory uses disguises to wander around in settlements and assess whether they're prepared for war. The spy is cannier than Tavitz, and her rune gives her heightened senses—darkvision (the Stealth group check to follow her is DC 15 instead of 12). She sometimes flirts with the idea of betraying Olek so she can ascend to a higher place in the Brotherhood, but she has yet to settle on a plan with a reasonable chance of success.

Encounter 1: Grove of Statues

Encounter Level 11 (3,250 XP)

Setup

Ptolema, medusa archer (M)
Tiefling occultist (T)
4 runic statues (S)

Olek's lieutenant Ptolema stands guard on the rise above the underground library. Her other guards, creatures she has turned into stone statues, lie scattered about the grove. Thus, at the start of the fight, every enemy but Ptolema appears to be a statue.

When the adventurers come within sight of the grove, have the players place their miniatures on the northeast portion of the map, on or near the road, and read:

Ahead, the path meets a stone bridge that crosses a shallow stream. Beyond the bridge, the trees lie fallen and ruined. A few statues of humanoid creatures, their faces frozen in anguished expressions, are scattered among the dead foliage. Painted runes cover each statue.

Ptolema has a good vantage point. Unless the adventurers are especially stealthy, she sees them with time to spare. Make a Stealth check for her, opposed by the heroes' passive Perception checks. If she remains hidden, she waits for the first character to move into range, then takes a surprise round. If she rolls a low initiative, she uses the surprise round to kiss the tiefling's statue (see "Tactics" below). If she thinks she'll be able to act early in the first round, she instead fires an arrow on the surprise round.

Ptolema, Medusa Archer (M) **Level 12 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, female XP 700

HP 96; **Bloodied** 48 **Initiative** +12
AC 26, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23 **Perception** +14
Speed 6
Immune petrification; **Resist** 10 poison

Traits

The Rune of Poison's Curse
If Ptolema moves more than 4 squares on her turn, she becomes weakened until the end of her next turn.

Standard Actions

Serpent Hair (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 poison damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to saving throws until the end of Ptolema's next turn.

Shortbow (poison, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 30 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both).

Triggered Actions

Petrifying Stare ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy starts its turn within 2 squares of Ptolema.
Effect (Opportunity Action): Close blast 2 (triggering enemy in the blast). The target is slowed (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends).
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target is petrified until one of the following conditions is satisfied.
- ✦ The use of an appropriate power, such as *divine cleansing*.
- ✦ Ptolema's willing kiss (she might do this to gain information or to luxuriate in the victim's fear before returning it to stone).
- ✦ Ptolema is killed and her blood is applied to the stony lips of the victim before a full day passes.

The Rune of Poison's Boon (poison) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: Ptolema hits an enemy using *shortbow*.
Effect (No Action): The enemy takes ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The ongoing damage increases to 15.
Second Failed Saving Throw: The ongoing damage increases to 20.

Skills Bluff +15, Stealth +17

Str 14 (+8)	**Dex** 22 (+12)	**Wis** 17 (+9)
Con 18 (+10)	**Int** 12 (+7)	**Cha** 19 (+10)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment shortbow

When the adventurers notice Ptolema, read:

On the small hill ahead, a woman with green, scaly skin stands guard. Her hair is a mass of writhing snakes, and she holds a shortbow. A dark green rune covers her right forearm.

RUNE TRANSFERENCE

When Ptolema is defeated, her rune dissipates and re-forms on the arm of one of the adventurers. It should be a character who makes weapon attacks. The rune transfers immediately—the new bearer is able to use it right away. Meanwhile, Ptolema transforms into a water elemental as described under "The Forbidden Runes" on page 3. If fighting this elemental would be anticlimactic, then let it dissipate in a gush of water and subtract 600 XP from the encounter reward.

Tiefling Occultist (T) **Level 8 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid XP 350

HP 87; **Bloodied** 43 **Initiative** +4
AC 22, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 22 **Perception** +5
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Resist 10 fire

Standard Actions

Hell Rod (fire, implement) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 6 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends)

Soul Fire (fear, fire, implement, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: Ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). In addition, the first time the target willingly moves closer to the tiefling before the end of its next turn, the target takes 10 psychic damage.
Miss: Ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Move Actions

Baleful Teleport (teleportation) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Effect: Before the attack, the tiefling teleports up to 10 squares.
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +11 vs. Will
Hit: The tiefling teleports the target 10 squares to the square it just left.

Triggered Actions

Fiery Transposition (fire, teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An enemy hits the tiefling.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Close burst 3 (creatures in the burst). Each target takes 5 fire damage, and then the tiefling and the triggering enemy teleport, swapping positions.

Skills Bluff +14, Stealth +9
Str 10 (+4) **Dex** 11 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+5)
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 17 (+7) **Cha** 20 (+9)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, rod

4 Runic Statues (R) **Level 9 Brute**
Medium natural animate (construct) XP 400 each

HP 118; **Bloodied** 59 **Initiative** +6
AC 21, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 21 **Perception** +8
Speed 5
Immune disease, petrification; **Resist** 10 poison

Traits

Runes of Strength
At the start of the encounter, the statue has one rune of strength. It deals 1d12 extra damage per rune of strength it has beyond the first.

Standard Actions

Stone Fist ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 8 damage. If the target is adjacent to one of the statue's allies, it is also knocked prone.

Triggered Actions

Runic Gift ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The statue drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): The statue is destroyed, and each runic statue ally within 5 squares gains one additional rune of strength until the end of the encounter.
Str 22 (+10) **Dex** 14 (+6) **Wis** 18 (+8)
Con 18 (+8) **Int** 3 (+0) **Cha** 6 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Water Elemental **Level 11 Controller**
Medium elemental magical beast (aquatic, water) XP 600

HP 111; **Bloodied** 55 **Initiative** +8
AC 25, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22 **Perception** +5
Speed 6, swim 6
Vulnerable cold (see *sensitive to cold*)

Traits

Aquatic
The elemental can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.

Sensitive to Cold
Whenever the water elemental takes cold damage, it gains vulnerable 5 against the next attack that hits it before the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Slam ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

Whirlpool ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in burst); +14 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d6 + 7 damage, and the elemental slides the target 3 squares.

Minor Actions

Drowning Essence ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: The elemental slides each creature that has ongoing damage from its *slam* 2 squares.
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 11 (+5)
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 8 (+4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** understands Primordial

Tactics

The first chance she gets, Ptolema moves adjacent to the statue of the tiefling and kisses it as a minor action, dispelling the petrification.

When Ptolema frees the tiefling, read:

The woman kisses the lips of a statue next to her. It turns from stone to flesh, reverting to a living tiefling in leather armor and a red cape. Coughing as he returns to life, he recites a brief religious phrase. The statues across the grove begin shuffling toward you—not turned to flesh, but animated by the runes that cover them.

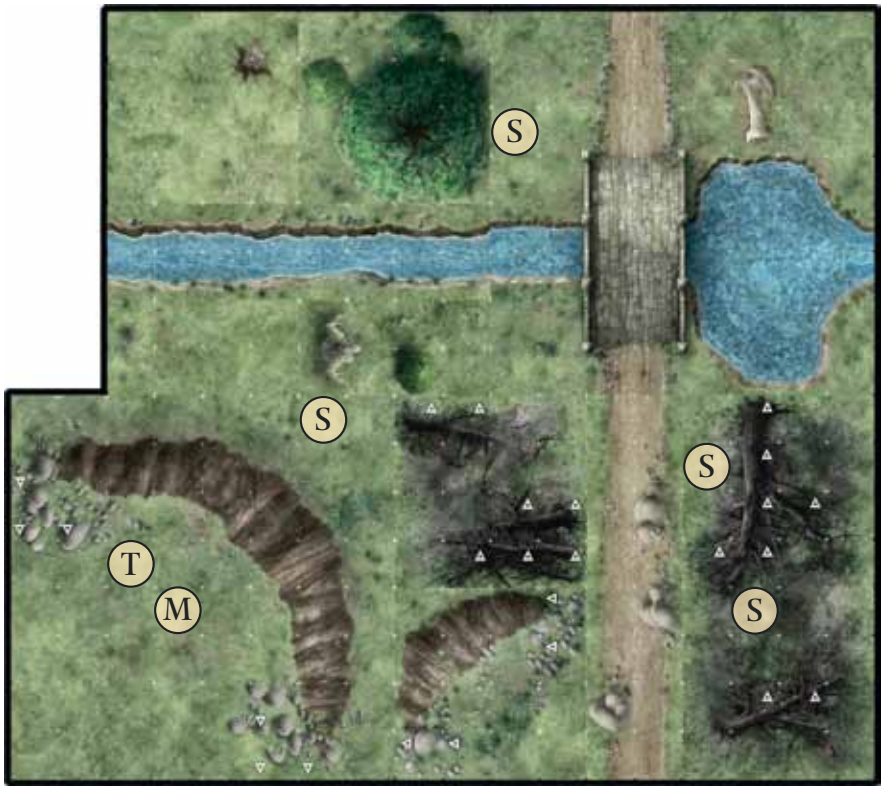
Roll initiative for the tiefling and the statues. If Ptolema used her action in the surprise round to kiss the tiefling's statue, the tiefling acts in the surprise round, but the statues don't.

Ptolema stays on the hill, guarding the entrance to the library and counting on her *petrifying stare* to take out anyone who gets close. The tiefling follows her lead, trying to get targets taking her ongoing poison damage within his *soul fire* burst.

The statues possess little intelligence, but are able to gang up to take advantage of their *stone fist* attacks. Either of the other monsters can call the statues, commanding them to attack anyone who gets close.

The monsters in the library below hear the fight above and start preparing for invaders. Jorag is happy to let Ptolema take the worst of an attack; after all, if she's gone, he has more influence with Olek. Still, if the battle drags on, Jorag and one or more minotaurs might come up to help.

Features of the Area



Illumination: Bright light during the day; dim light at night.

Cliffs: The 5-foot-high embankments require DC 12 Athletics checks to climb.

Statues: When they aren't active, the statues provide partial cover to creatures in their squares and are difficult terrain.

Trees: A creature in a square with a bush or the large tree's branches gains partial cover. The large tree's center square is blocking terrain. The fallen trees are difficult terrain.

Water: The steam is slow and shallow. A Medium creature can wade through it as difficult terrain. A Small creature requires a DC 10 Athletics check to move through it as difficult terrain; otherwise, the creature flounders, stopping and losing the remainder of its move.

Encounter 2: The Runic Library

Encounter Level 10 (2,700 XP)

Setup

Jorag, hobgoblin lieutenant (H)
Gargoyle rock hurler (G)
2 minotaur chargers (M)

The monsters have been warned about the adventurers' arrival by the sound of fighting outside. Make a Stealth check for the gargoyle and compare it to the characters' passive Perception. If the gargoyle beats them, it doesn't make itself known until its initiative. Otherwise, the adventurers notice the gargoyle when they enter.

Have the players place their miniatures on the staircase on the eastern edge of the map.

When the adventurers open the metal double doors, read:

In the large room beyond the doors, painted runes cover every surface. Some markings are active, pulsing with power. Other signs are sketchy—inactive and roughly painted.

A basin of bubbling water sits in the center of the room, flashing with ghostly images of different runes. The tiles around it have runes carved in them as well. At the far west end, connected by two short hallways, a dimly lit room holds two large statues.

Right in front of the stairs, a circle of runes is scribed on the floor. About a third of them glow. Past that, two old, eroded stone sarcophagi rise from the floor. Minotaurs with falchions hold positions by them. One stands; the other sits on a sarcophagus. As you arrive, they heft their weapons and prepare to charge.

Fire Elemental — **Level 11 Skirmisher**
Medium elemental magical beast (fire) — XP 600

HP 107; **Bloodied** 53 — **Initiative** +14
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23 — **Perception** +6
Speed 10, fly 6 (clumsy)
Vulnerable cold (see *frozen in place*)

Traits

Frozen in Place
Whenever the fire elemental takes cold damage, it cannot shift until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Slam (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex
Hit: Ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

Minor Actions

Flickering Flame ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The elemental shifts 2 squares.

Triggered Actions

Seething Fire (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An attack hits the elemental.
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy adjacent to the elemental takes 5 fire damage.

Str 10 (+5)	**Dex** 24 (+12)	**Wis** 13 (+6)
Con 11 (+5)	**Int** 5 (+2)	**Cha** 6 (+3)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** understands Primordial

Rune Transference

When Jorag is knocked out or killed, his neck runes dissipate and re-form on one of the adventurers. Any character could gain it, but it's likely to jump to another heavily armored and armed melee combatant. It avoids a character who already has a rune. The rune transfers immediately—the new bearer is able to use it right away. Meanwhile, Jorag transforms into a fire elemental (not a water elemental) as described under "The Forbidden Runes" on page 3. If fighting this elemental would be anticlimactic, then let it dissipate in a gout of flame and subtract 600 XP from the encounter reward.

Jorag, Hobgoblin Lieutenant (H) — **Level 12 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 700

HP 123; **Bloodied** 61 — **Initiative** +10
AC 28, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 26 — **Perception** +8
Speed 6

Standard Actions

Whip (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 15 damage, and Jorag can pull the target 1 square.

Javelin (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage.

Move Actions

Phalanx Movement ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Jorag and each ally adjacent to him can shift 1 square as a free action. The allies must end adjacent to Jorag.

Minor Actions

The Rune of Banefire's Boon (fire) ✦ **Encounter**
Requirement: Jorag must be bloodied.
Effect: Jorag gains a +2 bonus to AC, and each enemy that ends its turn adjacent to him takes 10 fire damage. Roll a d20 at the start of each of Jorag's turns. On a 9 or lower, the effect ends.

Triggered Actions

Swift Whip ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy within 2 squares of Jorag uses an attack power that does not include Jorag as a target.
Target: The triggering enemy
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Jorag uses *whip* against the target. If he hits, he doesn't pull the target, but the target takes a -5 penalty to the triggering attack roll.

Str 16 (+9)	**Dex** 15 (+8)	**Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 19 (+10)	**Int** 13 (+7)	**Cha** 22 (+12)

Alignment evil — **Languages** Common, Goblin
Equipment scale armor, whip, 3 javelins

Gargoyle Rock Hurler (G)	Level 11 Artillery
Medium elemental humanoid (earth)	XP 600
HP 87; **Bloodied** 43	**Initiative** +9
AC 25, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 19	**Perception** +13
Speed 6, fly 8	Darkvision
Traits	
Stone Defense	
The gargoyle has resist 10 to all damage from attacks originating at least 5 squares away from it.	
Standard Actions	
Claw ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +16 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.	
Hurled Stone ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +18 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d6 + 9 damage.	
Hail of Hurled Stone ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +18 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage, or 2d6 + 12 against a target in the burst's origin square.	
Miss: Half damage.	
Skills Stealth +14	
Str 22 (+11) **Dex** 18 (+9) **Wis** 17 (+8)	
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 17 (+8)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Primordial	
Equipment 10 stones	

Tactics

Jorag does not wear armor at all times, but should have plenty of time to don it once he hears the combat commence above. If you want to add a moment of drama, you could have Jorag delay his preparations as he listens to the fighting. In that case, he gets a late start on donning his armor and requires the first round of this encounter to complete that process. In that case, he remains behind the door until his initiative comes up during the second round, then steps out into the battle.

2 Minotaur Chargers (M)	Level 9 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid	XP 400 each
HP 94; **Bloodied** 47	**Initiative** +9
AC 23, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20	**Perception** +10
Speed 6	
Traits	
Deft Charge	
While the minotaur is charging, its movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.	
Standard Actions	
Falchion (weapon) **✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 4d4 + 7 damage.	
Handaxe (weapon) **✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Goring Rush ✦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the minotaur deals damage to the minotaur.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +12 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage, and the minotaur can push the target 1 square and shift 1 square to the square the target occupied. The minotaur can push the target and shift four more times in this way.	
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 13 (+5)	
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 14 (+6)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment falchion, 4 handaxes	

When Jorag arrives, read:

A tall hobgoblin in red scale mail throws open the door, brandishing a barbed whip. He screams to his cohorts, "Prove your worth! Show you can tear apart these interlopers, and Olek will reward you as he did me!" He pulls loose his gorget to show a series of runes encircling his neck, burning with faint orange embers.

Jorag stays close to the minotaurs, keeping them within 2 squares so he can protect them with his *swift whip* power. He uses his boon as soon as he can after being bloodied, then moves adjacent to an enemy and pulls another to him with his whip.

The monsters know how the runic tiles work. The minotaurs take full advantage, pushing adventurers into the active rune-warded tiles using *goring rush*.

The gargoyle stays back, flitting between the sides of the statue room and hurling rocks.

Development

At the start of each round, the runes on the floor cycle. See the descriptions of the runic circle, runic font, and rune-warded tiles under "Features of the Area" below.

Features of the Area

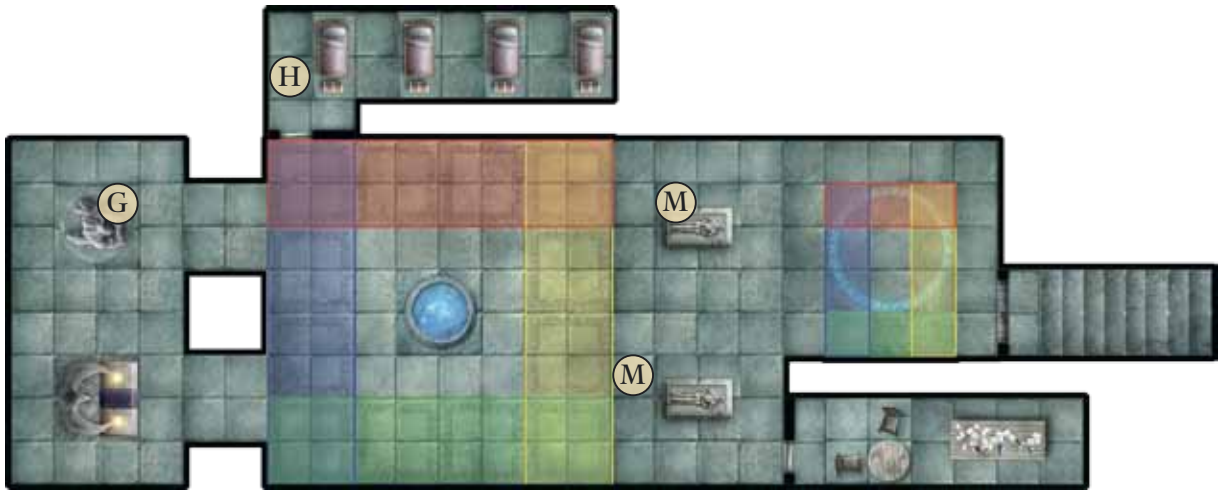
Illumination: Bright light in the main areas; dim light in the statue room and bunk room.

Beds: Beds are difficult terrain. The footlockers have weak locks (Thievery DC 12 to pick) and contain a few coins each. These coins are part of the treasures for this section of the adventure (see "Treasure" below).

Ceiling: The ceiling is 10 feet high.

Doors: The door to Olek's study is locked (Thievery DC 18). The double door entrance and the door to the bunk room have no locking mechanisms.

Runic Circle: Depending on which rune is showing in the runic font, a section of the runic circle near the entrance glows brightly. The colored areas indicate which one is lit at any time. When the adventurers enter, the red runes are lit. The illumination then cycles to yellow at the start of the next round, then green, then blue, then back to red. (The



color coding is for your reference; no such colors appear on the runes themselves.) The lit runes of the circle indicate which rune-warded tiles around the font are active; the circle runes have no effect on their own.

Runic Font: The basin in the middle of the room is filled with roiling holy water. Runes appear across its surface, cycling between four major symbols. Each symbol lights some of the runes in the runic circle and activates some of the rune-warded tiles around the font, creating a sort of resonant prayer—a cyclical mantra that strengthens Olek's rune smithing.

Rune-Warded Tiles: The tiles around the font don't glow or give any other outward indication of their effect, but they match the pattern of the runic circle. When an area is active (the four tiles shown in red on the first round, for example), any adventurer who moves into one of those squares by any means takes ongoing 10 radiant damage (save ends) and is teleported to one of the corresponding squares on the runic circle.

Sarcophagi: These battered, closed stone sarcophagi were left by the creatures that once lived here. They contain nothing but looted, splintered, brittle bones.

Statues: Two statues stand at the western end of the library, one of Bane (where the gargoyle starts) and one of a sphinx. The Bane statue appears of more recent origin, and both are covered with runes. The reason for the Bane statue is obvious to anyone who knows Olek's background. A DC 17 Arcana or Religion check reveals that sphinxes are sometimes treated as minor deities by monsters. Perhaps the creatures that created this place before Olek arrived worshiped the sphinx. Olek might have kept the sphinx statue as a symbol of the mystery he was trying to solve while he mastered the forbidden runes.

Treasure: Generate two treasure rewards from the Treasure by Party Level table (*Rules Compendium*, page 300). The valuables are composed of art objects or magic items the adventurers find in Olek's study and gems or coins found in the runic font and the footlockers.

DISABLING THE RUNIC FONT

Any hero who examines the runic font closely and succeeds on a DC 25 Arcana or DC 17 Religion check understands that the cycling runes are a power source accessible by a specially bonded creature, presumably Olek, from a distance. The adventurer also understands that the cycle can be disrupted. The party won't have enough time during combat to do so, however.

The simplest way to stop the cycle is to empty the holy water from the font. The heroes can also remove the runes on the floor, either on the smaller runic circle or on the rune-warded tiles. Destroying runes on the warded tiles prevents the corresponding section of the runic circle from glowing and disrupts the magic. If the adventurers are able to disrupt the process, **Encounter 3: The Shattered Prison** runs a little differently. Removing runes from the runic circle does not stop the process on the tiles—it just stops indicating what tiles are affected—and does not disrupt the cycle.

Encounter 3: The Shattered Prison

Encounter Level 14 (5,700 XP)

Setup

Olek Dael (O)
2 runic gargoyles (G)
3 fire elementals (F)
2 water elementals (W)

Just in time, the adventurers find Olek preparing to call down what he thinks is the avatar of his god.

When the adventurers arrive, have the players place their miniatures on the southeast corner of the map. Then read:

Olek stands encircled by monoliths, chanting loudly in Supernal. The standing stones—completely covered with runes—glow faintly, pulsing stronger whenever he finishes a stanza.

Overhead, a mass of sea-blue clouds descends, crackling with red-orange sheet lightning. This uncanny combination creates the appearance of fire coursing across an airborne ocean. For a moment, the clouds gather into shapes that resemble arms stretching down toward the earth. A flash of lightning illuminates a grinning visage in the clouds.

Make Stealth checks for the gargoyles and compare them to the characters' passive Perception.

If an adventurer notices one or more gargoyles, point them out and read:

Grasping the side of a standing stone is a statue of a winged creature covered in runes. It moves ever so slightly.

Olek Dael (O) **Level 12 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (dwarf) XP 1,400

HP 244; **Bloodied** 122 **Initiative** +7
AC 26, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 25 **Perception** +12
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Saving Throws + 2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Rune Effect
Whenever Olek uses an attack power, he chooses one of its two rune effects (conquest or resistance). He gains that effect for that use of that power.

Rune of Command's Curse
After Olek uses *rune of command's blessing*, whenever he rolls a natural 5 or lower on his first attack roll during a turn, he's dominated by Hoshotath until the end of his next turn. Hoshotath commands Olek to attack one of the heroes.

Runic Font
If the runic font in Olek's library is active, he has an extra action point.

Stand the Ground
Olek can move 1 square fewer than the effect specifies when subjected to a pull, a push, or a slide.

Steady-Footed
Olek can make a saving throw to avoid falling prone when an attack would knock him prone.

Standard Actions

Runic Warhammer (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 11 damage.
Effect (Rune of Conquest): The target falls prone.
Effect (Rune of Resistance): Olek or an ally adjacent to the target gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses until the end of Olek's next turn.

Runic Seal (radiant, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 11 radiant damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).
Effect (Rune of Conquest): Each enemy adjacent to the target takes 8 radiant damage.
Effect (Rune of Resistance): One ally adjacent to the target gains 10 temporary hit points.

Rune of Command's Blessing (charm) ✦ **Encounter**
Requirement: Olek must be bloodied.
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. Will
Hit: Olek dominates the target until the end of his next turn.
Effect (Rune of Conquest): Olek gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls until the end of his next turn.
Effect (Rune of Resistance): Any target the attack misses is weakened until the end of Olek's next turn.

Minor Actions

Runic Duality ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: Olek takes a second standard action. He must use an attack power.

Skills Religion +13

Str 24 (+13)	**Dex** 12 (+7)	**Wis** 23 (+12)
Con 18 (+10)	**Int** 15 (+8)	**Cha** 16 (+9)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Dwarven, Supernal
Equipment scale armor, warhammer

If the characters talk to Olek, consult the "Parley with Olek" sidebar. If they manage to convince him that what he's doing will free one or more primordials, he stops his chanting and erases the runes from the stones. Even so, Hoshotath begins to break through and starts attacking. Olek sides with the adventurers and fights against the elementals while trying to remove the runes.

If the adventurers fight Olek, read:

As you prepare to attack, Olek extends a warhammer covered with intricate runes toward you. He shouts, "Bane gives gifts beyond knowledge. Expect no quarter. Expect defeat!"

RUNE TRANSFERENCE

If Olek is defeated, the massive rune on his torso dissipates and re-forms on one of the adventurers. It likely binds to a character who uses the divine power source or has a high Religion modifier. It avoids any character who already has a rune. The rune transfers immediately—the new bearer is able to use it right away. Meanwhile, Olek transforms into a water elemental as described under "The Forbidden Runes" on page 3. If fighting this elemental would be anticlimactic, then let it dissipate in a gush of water and subtract 600 XP from the encounter reward.

2 Runic Gargoyles (G) **Level 8 Soldier**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth) XP 350 each

HP 87; **Bloodied** 43 **Initiative** +8
AC 24, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 22 **Perception** +12
Speed 6, fly 8 Darkvision
Immune petrification

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the gargoyle's next turn.

↓ **Avenging Claws** ✦ **Recharge** when the gargoyle's master is first bloodied
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the gargoyle's next turn.

Move Actions

To the Master (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The gargoyle teleports to a square within 2 squares of its master.

Triggered Actions

Shielding Wings ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The gargoyle must be adjacent to its master.
Trigger: The gargoyle's master takes damage.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The gargoyle takes the damage instead of its master.

Skills Athletics +14, Stealth +11

Str 20 (+9)	**Dex** 15 (+6)	**Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 15 (+6)	**Int** 10 (+4)	**Cha** 11 (+4)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Primordial

3 Fire Elementals (F) **Level 11 Skirmisher**
Medium elemental magical beast (fire) XP 600 each

HP 107; **Bloodied** 53 **Initiative** +14
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23 **Perception** +6
Speed 10, fly 6 (clumsy)
Vulnerable cold (see *frozen in place*)

Traits

Frozen in Place
Whenever the fire elemental takes cold damage, it cannot shift until the end of its next turn.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Slam** (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex
Hit: Ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

Minor Actions

Flickering Flame ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The elemental shifts 2 squares.

Triggered Actions

Seething Fire (fire) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An attack hits the elemental.
Effect (Free Action): Each enemy adjacent to the elemental takes 5 fire damage.

Str 10 (+5)	**Dex** 24 (+12)	**Wis** 13 (+6)
Con 11 (+5)	**Int** 5 (+2)	**Cha** 6 (+3)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** understands Primordial

2 Water Elementals (W)	Level 11 Controller
Medium elemental magical beast (aquatic, water)	XP 600 each
HP 111; **Bloodied** 55	**Initiative** +8
AC 25, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22	**Perception** +5
Speed 6, swim 6	
Vulnerable cold (see *sensitive to cold*)	
Traits	
Aquatic	
The elemental can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.	
Sensitive to Cold	
Whenever the water elemental takes cold damage, it gains vulnerable 5 against the next attack that hits it before the end of its next turn.	
Standard Actions	
ⓘ **Slam ✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).	
✧ **Whirlpool ✦ Encounter**	
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in burst); +14 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 4d6 + 7 damage, and the elemental slides the target 3 squares.	
Minor Actions	
Drowning Essence ✦ At-Will (1/round)	
Effect: The elemental slides each creature that has ongoing damage from its *slam* 2 squares.	
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 11 (+5)	
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 8 (+4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** understands Primordial	

Tactics

Although Olek, his allies, and the spawned elementals are as antagonistic toward each other as they are toward the party, this encounter remains a difficult one, particularly for a group of lower-level characters.

Olek's rune effects provide him plenty of flexibility, but that flexibility also makes him complex to run. Remember that he can take two standard actions per turn. Once he's bloodied, Olek becomes desperate and uses his *rune of command's blessing* (see "Development" below).

The gargoyles protect Olek from both adventurers and elementals. If the creatures are still alive when the runepriest is defeated, their runes fade and they become inert statues.

The elementals have no loyalty to Olek, attacking both sides equally. They don't put much strategy behind their attacks, though they do gang up on anyone who starts using cold attacks against any elemental or who attempts to deactivate pillars.

Development

When Olek becomes bloodied, he uses *rune of command*. The activation of this final rune allows Hoshotath to reach through the bounds of its prison into the world. Pause to read the following, then continue with the rest of the runepriest's turn.

EFFECT OF DISABLING THE RUNIC FONT

If the adventurers disrupted Olek's runic system in the library, this fight gets a little easier: Olek has 1 action point instead of 2. You can add flavor by having the runepriest chant some words to access his runic font during the battle. When the power does not flow, he realizes that the heroes have attacked his library.

At some point during Olek's next turn after he is bloodied, read:

The dwarf concentrates, and a massive rune on his torso flares. Bands of light stream out from the symbols to strike the standing stones all around. The clouds above coalesce into a massive humanoid shape formed half of water and half of flame. Rain pouring from one half hisses into rolling steam as it nears the other half. The ill-formed creature appears to be struggling, like it's breaking through a barrier.

Olek peers at it with confusion and says, "Bane? Have you answered my prayers?"

Roll initiative for Hoshotath. Each time the primordial's initiative comes up, it sweeps its limbs across the battlefield along the lines indicated on the map—a three-fingered hand of fire and two tendrils of water. Each character caught in the path takes damage: 1d10 + 10 fire damage and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends) for the fiery fingers; 2d10 + 10 damage for the watery tendrils.

The first time Hoshotath does a sweep, its primordial flesh sloughs off, leaving three fire elementals and two water elementals behind. They appear in any square the primordial's appendages passed through, adjacent to a person or object. The development assumes that the adventurers are trouncing Olek and the gargoyles at this point. If not, you can roll the extra enemies out more slowly, dropping two or so each round.

Each time Hoshotath sweeps the field, it also smashes two standing stones. The power invested in them discharges, widening the cracks in the metaphysical walls of its prison.

Olek's Behavior: Even after the primordial appears, Olek doesn't realize it isn't an avatar of his god. Once he gets hit by the primordial or one of the

elementals, he's pretty sure he's made a mistake. He might attack the elementals or attempt to deactivate standing stones using his rune. If near defeat, he might also flee. If so, make sure the adventurers know that containing Hoshotath is impossible without the assistance of Olek's rune. They must access that rune, through him or despite him.

Sealing the Prison: The bearer of the rune of command (whether Olek or someone else) understands that he or she can deactivate a pillar with a standard action. (If the primordial is about to destroy the last two pillars, pick a recipient of the rune who can act, or use an action point, before Hoshotath does). The Flaming Sea must destroy all the pillars while they are active. If any pillar is deactivated, the primordial is sucked back into its prison, unable to fight its way out.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light during the day; dim light at night (from the near continuous lightning).

Cliffs: The 5-foot-high embankments require DC 12 Athletics checks to climb.

Rock: The large stone is 10 feet high and requires a DC 15 Athletics check to climb.

Standing Stones: The stones are blocking terrain. After a stone is destroyed by Hoshotath, itsw square becomes difficult terrain.

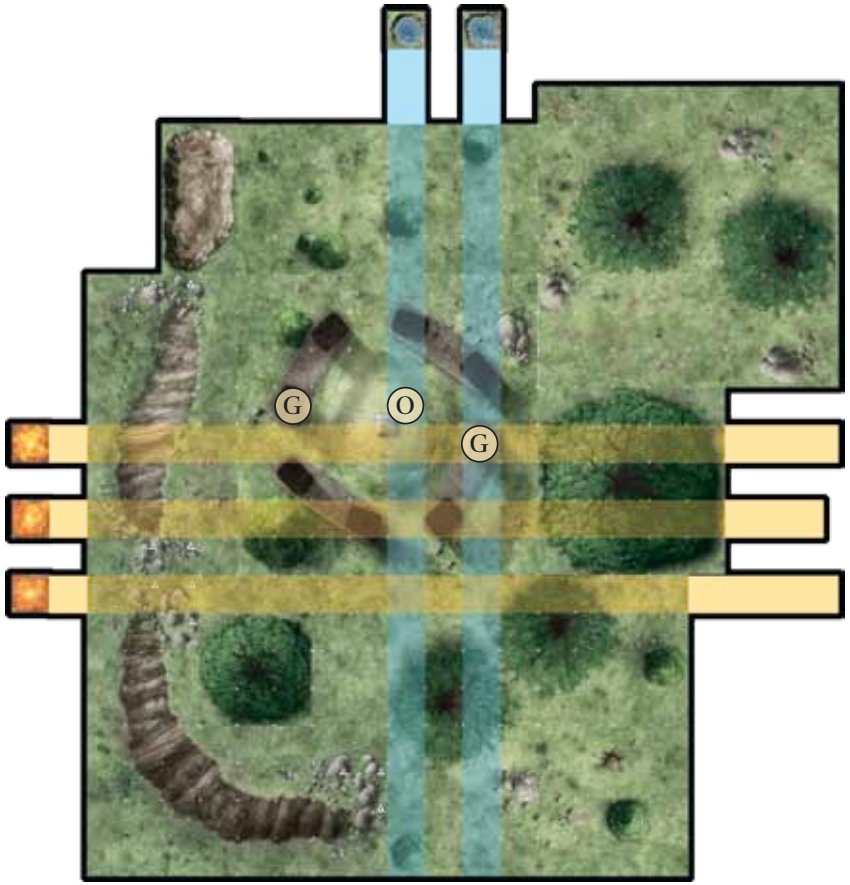
Trees: A creature in a square with a bush or the large tree's branches gains partial cover. The large trees' center squares are blocking terrain.

Treasure: Generate one treasure reward from the Treasure by Party Level table (*Rules Compendium*, page 300). The reward consists of the items on Olek's person, plus what he has been using for his rituals and rune smithing. Instead of gems, use an equal value of residuum.

Conclusion

If the adventurers defeat Olek and deactivate at least one standing stone before they are all smashed, Hoshotath screams as it is sucked back into its runic prison. Any runes bound to the adventurers (and anyone else Olek favored) fade as the primordial's thought-construct prison re-forms as strong as it was before the runepriest began manipulating the runes.

If the primordial destroys all the stones, it breaks through, returning to the world. The burning half of its body starts a massive forest fire while its watery half triggers a flood that drowns the nearby countryside. Hoshotath is free to rampage and destroy; the adventurers have failed utterly and doomed the surrounding lands. It might not be too late to save the world, but the adventurers have an uphill battle if they mean to overcome the power of a primordial (see "After the Adventure").



About the Author

Logan Bonner's 4th Edition work includes *Player's Handbook®, Arcane Power™, The Slaying Stone™, and both Adventurer's Vault™ supplements*. He collected a rare hat trick on *Draconomicon®: Metallic Dragons* by providing additional design, development, and lead editing. He lives in the Seattle area and works as a freelance game designer, writer, and editor. You can follow him on Twitter, where he's loganbonner.

DARK·SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun
Eldaarich

By Travis Stout and Rodney Thompson ✦ Illustration by Kerem Beyit

For seven hundred years, Eldaarich stood closed. Its mighty stone doors remained sealed, and its people huddled behind the walls in fear of what awaited them outside. Those who approached found no answer to their hails, and those daring to scale its walls were never seen again. Over time, the city-state was forgotten. Located far to the north of the Tyr Region, almost out of the reach of dune traders, the city was too distant for the trip to be worthwhile once the gates were closed. Eldaarich faded into myth, and then all but the sorcerer-kings forgot about it.

As silent as it was, someone still lived in Eldaarich. The client villages and outer fortifications continued to serve the city's mad king, Daskinor, and they still guarded the ancient roads leading into and out of the island city-state. Slaves hauled foodstuffs to waiting baskets hanging from giant-hair ropes, loading up their bounty and withdrawing only to find the baskets emptied and waiting once more the next time they checked. But no proclamations came from the sorcerer-king, and few templars emerged to enforce his will.

And then, the stone doors opened and a bridge lowered. A single figure strode out from the city to cross the causeway and assert the sorcerer-king's will once more. Messengers to distant Kurn invited the merchants from House Azeth to bring those goods the city demanded in exchange for gold and silver, and thus Eldaarich stepped into the world once more, blinking and terrified by the changes all around it.

Eldaarich's conditions and character stem from its sorcerer-king's madness. Never a lucid monarch,

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Daskinor displayed uncertainty in his early reign, and he was given to strange, unexplainable delusions. He saw conspiracies in every face and daggers in every shadow. He knew enemies loomed to all sides, and so every decision he made about his fledgling city-state served to bolster its defenses. He raised a powerful army and constructed walls and fortifications so tall and thick that even the Dragon of Tyr would be daunted. War machines stood atop the battlements, ready to rain pitch, stones, and spears on the phantom enemies Daskinor knew would come across the horizon.

Not content when those defenses were established, the sorcerer-king ordered new fortifications built on the surrounding islands, and he linked them by bridges that would collapse or retract to protect the city in case of invasion. Daskinor also fortified key access points to ensure that any enemies would first need to besiege the smaller outposts before crashing against the city's ramparts. Fort Holz garrisoned an entire legion on a small island to the northeast, and South Guard blocked access to the city's bridges while also managing the extensive fields that produce the crops needed to feed the city. The third and newest outpost, Silt Side, serves as the only trading post permitted near the city-state.

The city-state's shift to open trade with Kurn has not changed conditions in the city. No one enters Eldaarich and no one leaves, aside from Daskinor's templars. It has been seven centuries since a foreigner walked the city streets.

BEFORE THE GATES OPEN

Though Eldaarich makes an interesting adventure locale thanks to its strong flavor of paranoia, the city-state can also be a good source of intrigue before its gates are opened. If you want to have the opening of the gates to Eldaarich happen during the course of your campaign, and if you want to make sure it is an event that characters hear about not long after it happens (or perhaps witness), you can use some of the following adventure hooks to introduce Eldaarich earlier in the campaign.

- **Doomed Trader:** The heroes stumble across a dying man in the desert who claims to have escaped from the clutches of the "Mad King of Eldaarich." Upon further investigation, the heroes discover that the man was a dune trader before he suffered great abuse. Among his belongings they find a tattered trade map that leads them to a secret storehouse where his most valuable wares are stored—if they can get past its guardians.
- **Frightening Contagion:** Something has been spreading throughout the noble houses of Tyr. A rash of murders and other forms of violence—common among the lower classes of people in the nigh-lawless parts of Tyr—have broken out among the city's elite. Agents of Tithian have discovered that the source of the violence is a shipment of wine from the northeast, supposedly one of the last batches to make it out of a fabled lost city-state to the north of the Tyr Region. The templars are hunting down every bottle they can find; secretly, they hope to use the wine against other city-states by shipping it to their enemies and letting madness do the rest. Similarly, the Veiled Alliance would pay a great deal to have some of those wine bottles so that they can slip them into the sorcerer-kings' wine cellars.
- **Templar's Suspicions:** The heroes are approached by a templar from Balic who offers them a chance to earn a hefty sum (or pardons for crimes, or another reward tailored to the heroes) if they undertake a scouting mission. The templar tells them of a lost city-state called Eldaarich, which has not been heard from in years. The last time Andropinis sent templars as ambassadors to the city-state around two hundred years ago, they returned babbling and insane. The templar recently learned that client villages are still operating outside the city. The heroes are directed to visit the client villages, discover what is going on behind the walls of Eldaarich, and report their findings.

The truth is that Eldaarich is a rotting city. When its doors were sealed, residents had to survive on only those resources present in the city. Aside from food brought over the walls, almost nothing has made its way inside. Buildings show their great age, disease haunts the city streets, madness is widespread, and the people are deranged, malnourished, and fraught with hideous mutations arising from generations of inbreeding.

The cobbled streets twist and wind between the crumbling buildings. When structures collapsed, new buildings were erected atop the same foundations, using salvaged brick and timber as building material. The result is a city of leaning, sagging towers made of cracked, mismatched stone and brick. Some buildings lean against each other to form shadowy alleys underneath, while others have collapsed altogether under the great weight above. No rubble lingers long, because the people salvage what they can to repair structures and raise their towers ever higher.

Eldaarich once had distinct quarters and districts divided by trade and social class. The steep walls that separated them fell long ago, and the city's inhabitants incorporated their stones into the tangled structures that compose the city proper. The upper, more perilous chambers house the nobility, who live high enough above the streets that they escape the city's appalling stench. Tradespeople and artisans claim the middle levels. The destitute, the enslaved, and the most wretched occupy the lowest levels amid the filth and squalor dropped from above them.

Layers of Paranoia

Eldaarich mirrors the other city-states in the Tyr Region, with all power and authority resting in its sorcerer-king's hands. Unlike the other sorcerer-kings, Daskinor trusts none of his templars, and he schemes and plots against them even as he lends them the power they need to carry out his will. On par with the templars is the nobility, descendants of those warriors who accompanied and aided Daskinor during bygone years. For templars and nobles, life is little better than for the slaves, because they are all subject to the sorcerer-king's whims. A noble might one day stand in Daskinor's good grace, only to be annihilated by dark magic when the sorcerer-king decides the noble is his worst enemy.

PERVASIVE MADNESS

Seven centuries spent cloistered behind imposing walls has spread the paranoia and madness afflicting the sorcerer-king to his subjects. The insanity isn't a curse or a disease, but comes from his views and beliefs being so ingrained in the city's culture that nearly every person under his rule now shares his delusions. From the templars to the slaves, everyone in Eldaarich believes a plot is afoot and that hidden treachery is at work to undermine or destroy them. People go about in heavy, hooded robes to conceal themselves in hopes of thwarting their rivals, and most retreat from any confrontation. Assassination is common, and templars and nobles wage a secret war of knives and poisons as they seek to eliminate their enemies before those same enemies can strike at them. Eldaarich is an insane city, and every fear, no matter how far-fetched, is real and present in the hearts and minds of its people.

The Mad King Daskinor

Paranoid, given to fantastic delusions, and gripped by fear, Daskinor is as dangerous as he is mad. The seeds of his insanity were present long ago, but it has grown in intensity over the centuries so that now, his terror is broken only by random outrage and accusations. Daskinor's diseased mind invents enemies where none exist, and they change all the time. Some new threat swims up through his mind's fog, and once he puts a name to it, he expends every resource at his disposal to destroy it. His recent targets include the Veiled Alliance, the tanning industry, three clueless slaves, nobles, templars, ordinary citizens, colors, and whatever else catches his attention in a negative way. Daskinor does experience rare, fleeting periods when he is nearly lucid, or at least, when he is less dangerous to others than he normally is. He is experiencing one such period now. No one believes that it will last, and all wait resignedly for the next threat to assail their eccentric king.

Daskinor, Sorcerer-King **Level 20 Solo Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid **XP 14,000**

HP 704; **Bloodied** 352 **Initiative** +11
AC 34, **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 33 **Perception** +13
Speed 5
Immune dominated
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Stench of Paranoia ✦ Aura 3
Enemies are slowed while in the aura.

Man of Two Minds
On an initiative count of 10 + his initiative check, Daskinor takes a standard, a move, or a minor action of his choice as a free action. If Daskinor cannot use a free action as a result of a dazing or stunning effect, that effect ends immediately, instead of him taking the action.

Standard Actions

Taloned Grasp ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +25 vs. AC
Hit: 4d8 + 10 damage.

Ego Whip (psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +25 vs. Will
Hit: 3d12 + 9 psychic damage.
Miss: Half damage.

Psychic Repulsion (psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Close burst 3 (creatures in the burst); +23 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d12 + 8 psychic damage, and Daskinor pushes the target up to 3 squares.
Miss: Half damage, and Daskinor can push the target 1 square.

Eruption of Madness (psychic) **✦ Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 5 (creatures in the burst); +23 vs. Will
Hit: 3d12 + 9 psychic damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: Each target must take a free action to charge or make a melee basic attack against the creature nearest to it. If an enemy and an ally are the same distance from the target, the target must attack the ally.

Move Actions

Get Away from Me! (psychic, teleportation) **✦ At-Will**
Requirement: Daskinor must have at least one enemy within 3 squares of him.
Effect: Each enemy adjacent to Daskinor takes 20 psychic damage, and he teleports up to 6 squares.

Minor Actions

Reveal Treachery (charm, psychic) **✦ At-Will** (1/round)
Requirement: Daskinor must be bloodied.
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +25 vs. Will
Hit: 3d10 + 12 psychic damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: Daskinor slides the target a number of squares up to its speed, and the target makes a melee basic attack as a free action against a target of Daskinor's choice.

Triggered Actions

Evil Twin (illusion) **✦ Encounter**
Trigger: Daskinor becomes bloodied.
Effect (No Action): Daskinor creates a psionic manifestation of his evil twin, which appears in an unoccupied square within 5 squares of him and lasts until the end of the encounter. The evil twin appears to be Daskinor but is illusory and cannot be attacked. When Daskinor moves, he can move his evil twin an equal number of squares as a part of the same action. Daskinor can make *ego whip* and *psychic repulsion* attacks as though he occupies the square of his evil twin.

Psionic Reflection ✦ At-Will
Trigger: Daskinor takes psychic damage from an attack.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Daskinor uses *ego whip*.

Skills Arcana +21, Religion +21

Str 8 (+9)	**Dex** 12 (+11)	**Wis** 16 (+13)
Con 8 (+9)	**Int** 23 (+16)	**Cha** 26 (+18)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic

The years weigh heavily on the sorcerer-king. Once a thin, vibrant man, Daskinor is frail, sallow, and wrinkled. His eyes are wide and overlarge, flicking back and forth as he rocks on his throne. Daskinor hoards everything in the belief that his enemies can use anything he discards against him. He never cuts his hair or fingernails, and he never bathes out of fear that an assassin might extract some essence from the dirtied water and render it into a poison that can kill even a sorcerer-king.

Currently, Daskinor frets about those who possess psionic power. His templars scour the city for anyone displaying talent with the Way, and those discovered are executed with no recourse. That Daskinor also has great psionic power is not lost on the sorcerer-king and, in darker moments, he suspects even himself of evil plotting; thus, he permits no mirrors in his quarters, lest he catch himself in his own gaze and fall prey to an attack from his subconscious.

ELDAARICH AT A GLANCE

Eldaarich is more prison than city-state, because no citizen is allowed to leave and no one is allowed to enter. Only templars can pass through the gates, and they rarely do so.

Population Mix: The dominant humans have fallen far from their once noble forms. Most bear a mark or a sign of their dubious ancestry. Dwarves are well represented in the city, and many live as nobles and templars. Half-giants and muls have smaller populations, and all are slaves. Few members of other races live in this city-state.

Water: South Guard has sufficient water reserves to supplement those in the larger city. Eldaarich's water has a metallic flavor that makes it unpleasant but not unpalatable.

Supplies: Eldaarich has few natural resources aside from the farmland near South Guard. Renewed trade with Kurn is slowly bringing badly needed commodities into the city. The city-state uses slaves to mine gold and silver from the northeastern mountains that rise from the Sea of Silt. House Azeth merchants accept ingots in trade.

Defenses: The city is rotting from within, but its outer defenses are as strong as they ever were. Eldaarich boasts a modest army of four thousand soldiers, nearly all of whom are slaves. A soldier's life is better than most citizens' lives, so that many slaves clamor for the chance to guard the city-state.

Inns and Taverns: Because foreigners are not permitted in the city, Eldaarich has no inns. Pleasure houses, smoking dens, and wine cellars offer distractions from the city's misery while also providing shadowy corners where conspirators can hatch their plots. Travelers can find shelter at Silt Side, where the Giant's Skull lets rooms for reasonable prices. Several oases along the Road of Kings also offer accommodations.

Honest Seers

The people closest to the sorcerer-king are his templars. He trusts none of them or all of them, depending on his mood. They call themselves the Honest Seers to impress their loyalty and reliability upon their master, ensuring that they have no secrets from his majesty.

They might show fawning devotion to the sorcerer-king, but they are not as upright as they profess. They plot and scheme against each other continually. Alliances form and shatter with regularity as they jockey to gain the sorcerer-king's favor and diminish their rivals in his rheumy eyes. Few templars last long in Eldaarich, since they spend half their time orchestrating assassination attempts against their enemies.

One segment of templars stands as an exception. Despite their surroundings, the High Templars show unexpected poise and sanity. It is through their influence that Eldaarich has softened its position to the outer world, and that change has freed these templars to escape from the madness and manage the city-state from the relative security and sanity found in the client villages. Some whisper that these High Templars intend to remove Daskinor from power, but accusations like these fly all the time.

Honest Seer	**Level 13 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid	**XP 800**
HP 128; **Bloodied** 64	**Initiative** +10
AC 27, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 26	**Perception** +5
Speed 6	

Standard Actions

Poisoned Dagger (poison, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC
Hit: 4d4 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). If the target is granting combat advantage to the seer, the ongoing damage increases to 10.

Insidious Madness (charm) ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The seer must not be bloodied.
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +16 vs. Will
Hit: The target must make a melee basic attack as a free action against a creature of the seer's choice, with a +4 bonus to the attack roll.

Move Actions

Cloaking Shadows ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The seer shifts up to 3 squares and gains partial concealment until the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions

Dreadful Scream (psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The seer becomes bloodied.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +16 vs. Will
Hit: 2d10 + 7 psychic damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The target is dazed until the end of the seer's next turn.

Furtive Retreat ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: The seer is hit by an attack while it is not bloodied.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The seer shifts 1 square.

Skills Arcana +15

Str 11 (+6)	**Dex** 15 (+8)	**Wis** 8 (+5)
Con 16 (+9)	**Int** 19 (+10)	**Cha** 22 (+12)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Equipment dagger

South Guard

South Guard is nearly as old as Eldaarich. It was established by nobles to be a cultured retreat from their plantations, and they arranged it around the original trade route leading to the city-state. When Daskinor sealed the city, many nobles were trapped inside and forced to cede their land to the overseers and templars left outside. South Guard expected no aid or military support from the parent city, even though the village was obliged to feed those in the city. After seven centuries, South Guard is a different place: wealthy, cosmopolitan, and welcoming to travelers. The village's loyalty to Daskinor has never wavered, but none of the villagers regret the distance between themselves and the mad sorcerer-king.

Lord Oesten

As ruler and governor of South Guard, Oesten thanks his ancestors every day for their wisdom in settling outside the city-state so long ago. He is an even-tempered and fair man whose abhorrence for slavery results in plantation workers having a degree of freedom. In fact, these workers are slaves in name only; they can come and go as they please. Eldaarich's recent activity concerns Lord Oesten, and he suspects that a dark future might await his subjects.

Silt Side

Although Eldaarich opened its doors to new trade with House Azeth, the sorcerer-king still would not permit foreigners in his city. Instead, a trade depot was established on the mainland. Silt Side is a small settlement with a few buildings and warehouses made of stone quarried from the rocky badlands to the north. With no water and no means to sustain itself, Silt Side must rely on traders to bring in its supplies. Despite these hardships, Silt Side is growing and should continue to do so for as long as Daskinor permits it to exist.

Kerrilis

The High Templar Kerrilis oversees trade relations and all affairs concerning Silt Side. She and her peers persuaded Daskinor to establish new trade with Kurn, which has brought life and vigor to the ailing city-state. Kerrilis is an ambitious creature; some say that she intends to become Daskinor's queen, and the bounty she brings to the city is just another rung on her climb to the top.

Fort Holz

Fort Holz is a large, walled compound with a central keep, turreted towers at each corner, and extensive shipyards for constructing and repairing the silt skimmers that transport ore and miners to and from the mountains. The fort predates Eldaarich; construction on it began at the same time as on the city, but the fort was finished first. It guards the retractable bridge to the city-state and also serves as a launching point for expeditions to the nearby Four Towers, where gold and silver mining was under way before the fort or the city was raised. The fort was cut off from the sorcerer-king just as South Guard was. Since then, it has focused its effort on improving its defenses, safeguarding the mines, and driving off the giants that wade in from the Sea of Silt.

Commander Treeth

The garrison commander at Fort Holz is Commander Treeth, a grizzled, one-armed dwarf with little patience and no manners. He despises Eldaarich, but he is duty-bound to ensure that his workers coax every gold nugget they can from the Four Towers. Most of Treeth's soldiers inherited their positions from their parents, who inherited them from theirs, and so on for generations into the past.

Four Towers

From Fort Holz's mighty parapets, one can see the Four Towers rising above the blowing silt and standing strong against the dust storms that are so common in this region. The Four Towers are important to Eldaarich because they are rich in minerals, silver, and gold. The ore extracted from the Four Towers has been a key to the reopening of trade; it is one of the few commodities Eldaarich has to offer.

The trip from Fort Holz to the stone docks at the base of the Four Towers takes several hours by silt skimmer. Across the treacherous pier, stone steps climb the mountainside to dark caves that house the miners' camp and allow access to the deep mines beyond. Giants, floaters, and silt horrors present constant danger to this operation.

Gorma

Commander Treeth's estranged wife, Gorma, runs the mining operation at Four Towers. This separation suits both of them just fine, because they loathe each other. Gorma oversees two dozen workers, and no one who has seen her at work doubts her skill with a pick or a lash.

Fortifications

The fortifications protecting Eldaarich are engineering marvels. Spread across several islands, they ensure that an attacking army pays a price before reaching the city's walls. Enemies must first seize and hold South Guard or Fort Holz before making their way across the perilous bridges that span the small islands, where more walls, towers, and defenders stand ready to throw back the attackers. If faced by a serious threat, the defenders can quickly knock a handful of key supports from under the bridges to spill the enemy into the silt basin below. Meanwhile, the bridges that cross into Eldaarich can be retracted, cutting off access to the city-state.

Each strongpoint has its own water supply, granary, arsenal, and barracks for one hundred warriors. Leaders at both Fort Holz and South Guard kept these locations manned and supplied even when Eldaarich offered nothing but silence.

The City

Two gates grant access to the city's interior: one to the southwest and the other to the northeast. Neglected roads, nearly reclaimed by scrub brush and tall grass, lead away from the city across bridges and eventually to the mainland. Except for those rare occasions when templars are entering or exiting, the gates are kept closed and barred. They have swung fully open only one time in seven hundred years.

To bring food and supplies into the city, guards manning the walls lower baskets and platforms to the wagons that arrive from South Gate or Silt Side. The lands around Eldaarich are also settled and cultivated by slaves and nobles who have lived for generations in the city's shadow.

Templars alone are permitted to exit or enter the city. Behind its walls, the city is more chaotic than anyone outside expected. No clear districts or neighborhoods exist; Eldaarich is a maze of alleys snaking through gaps between crooked buildings that are piled haphazardly atop one another and slowly crumbling together. Elevation is everything—the higher the residence, the better the standing of its inhabitants. Upper levels are accessed by stone stairways that wind around and through the buildings. Rickety bridges and scaffolding allow nobles and wealthy families to move between structures without ever setting foot on solid ground.

The Bowels

With the city-state already crowded, the people could either build up or build down. The templars commanded slaves to excavate tunnels and living chambers beneath the city. Here one finds the most wretched of Eldaarich's inhabitants: fugitive slaves, maimed criminals, outcasts, throwbacks, and even the mutant offspring of sunwarped creatures that crept into these warrens generations ago. The Bowels are an awful, hellish place prowled by disease, murder, and sinister creatures.

Warrens

Above the Bowels are Eldaarich's filthy streets. Hot, stinking, and choked with rubbish, the Warrens are barely fit for habitation. Only slaves, the destitute, and those who are too frightened to live in the Bowels live in the Warrens. Homes in the Warrens are little better than caves. Shadows cast by the surrounding buildings drench the streets in darkness day and night.

Dwarven Slum

The shabby, oddly misnamed corner called Dwarven Slum houses the city's highest concentration of slaves. Those living here are a mix of humans, dwarves, muls, and goliaths. The templars own them all. Noble families can purchase these slaves to serve as servants and attendants. A modest fighting ring here passes for Eldaarich's arena.

Maintainers and Fixers

Above the Warrens and extending several stories higher than the streets are the homes set aside for Eldaarich's free people. Here live the tradespeople, artisans, and laborers. They are not much better off than the rabble living below them, but in Eldaarich, any advantage is a source of pride.

Nobles' Aerie

Upper stories of any building house the nobility. Living high enough above the city's streets allows one to breathe air that is only mildly tainted with the city's stink and smoke. Slightly more breathable air is the only advantage to the Nobles' Aerie. Accommodations here are slightly less crude than elsewhere in Eldaarich, and they have the added disadvantage of being unstable. Upper floors balance atop layers of teetering, unsound construction. Many nobles and their homes have toppled into neighboring buildings, which often results in all tumbling to death and ruin in the streets below.

Towers of Truthw

A dozen domed turrets ring the Watchful Spire. These are the homes of the templars and their attendants. Proximity to the sorcerer-king does little to improve their condition. These structures show nearly as much wear as the rest of the city. Each tower contains personal chambers, communal dining halls, offices, and a barracks.

The Watchful Spire

Towering over every other structure in Eldaarich, nearly as pristine as when it was raised, is the Watchful Spire. This mighty building rises above the outer walls, which themselves are two hundred feet tall. It is topped with a glass dome so that Daskinor can peer out at his city. The sorcerer-king's residence is below the dome; the chambers, galleries, and rooms under it contain moldering treasures from a lost age. Not trusting to mortal guards, Daskinor relies on constructs to secure his towers. Homunculi, golems, and other creations creep and crawl through the labyrinthine passages to root out the sorcerer-king's hidden foes.

About the Authors

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast. Originally from Chattanooga, TN, his credits for the Dungeons & Dragons® game include *Monster Manual*® 3, the *Dark Sun*® *Campaign Setting*, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*™, and *Monster Vault*™.

When he isn't roaming the wastes in search of a few ceramic bits, **Travis Stout** works as a video game designer in southern California and rolls more dice than is probably good for him.

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When in Rome ...

Dungeon Editorial

by Steve Winter

One of the questions that perpetually swirls around off-hours **Dungeons & Dragons** conversations is the correct balance between strict adherence to the rules and the Dungeon Master's authority to change things. Interestingly, this debate goes all the way back to the very earliest editions of the D&D game, when the rules were so skimpy that it was flat-out impossible to play unless and until the DM made a host of decisions about how things would work. Even then, people debated to what degree the DM was justified in altering or setting aside rules that conflicted with or contradicted one another. In fact, an awful lot of what happened around the gaming table was spirited discussions (some might call them arguments) about what this or that rule actually meant, or whether something was a rule at all.

The level of rules writing, developing, and editing has risen tremendously since then. It's a tribute to both the clarity and completeness of the D&D rules that when we sit down to play now, only a tiny portion of our time is spent wondering whether we're doing something strictly according to the rules, and the answer is never more than a page flip or mouse click away.

But being clear and complete doesn't make rules sacrosanct. There's still plenty of room for DM input.

D&D's rules are like that often-maligned "book" you hear so much about in war movies. "Must you do everything by the book?" screams the fiery young lieutenant to the hidebound major. "Good men are dying out there because of your *book*!"

The implication is clear: people who rely on "the book" lack the imagination and intelligence to figure out a better way on their own.

That, however, is precisely the point of "the book." It doesn't define the one and only way to fight a battle. Instead, it codifies a tried-and-true way of doing something that you've never done before, or you're unsure about, or you don't have enough time to study fully and formulate your own plan. "The book" establishes a baseline of competence for those who might not otherwise rise above that level.

Always implicit in "the book" is the notion that no one can foresee every circumstance that might confront a commander at the scene of battle. If a situation calls for a different answer and a commander is confident in his ability to make that call, then it's expected that he will ignore "the book" and do what's going to achieve victory.

Consider the (somewhat pre-"book") example of the Roman army. Legions were trained to line up and fight a particular way. Their generals frequently had less experience at war than the soldiers themselves did, so when a general was unsure about how to conduct a battle, the best thing he could do was let the soldiers line up and fight the way they were accustomed to–"by the book."

But then a general would appear who had the experience, the knowledge, and the insight to see a better way. Men like Gaius Marius, Scipio Africanus, and Julius Caesar recognized when the surest way to victory was throwing "the book" onto the trash heap and making up their own rules.

The same thing applies to being a DM. "The book" ensures a standard of quality and competence. If you run D&D exactly as it's spelled out in the rules, powers, magic items, and monster stat blocks, you won't go wrong. You will get a game experience that's exciting and enjoyable for everyone, and all of your time around the table can be spent getting drawn into the adventure rather than puzzling over unfamiliar rules.

But the rulebooks don't know your campaign or your players the way you do. As the DM, you're the commander on the scene. Hannibal is waiting for you on the field of Zama, outnumbering you by 3:2 and with 80 war elephants to emphasize his point. Like Scipio, you may need to adapt to the situation by arraying your cohorts in a new way.

The current D&D rules are more robust and flexible than they've ever been. They will bend through amazing angles without breaking, and you know what they say about things that ain't broke. We bend them all the time—witness Dark Sun, Eberron, and Forgotten Realms, all of which have unique adaptations. Your campaign can be just as unique, if you take a lesson from Marius, Scipio, and Julius.

We'd like to hear how you've tailored D&D to fit your campaign. Send your insights to dndinsider@wizards.com

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